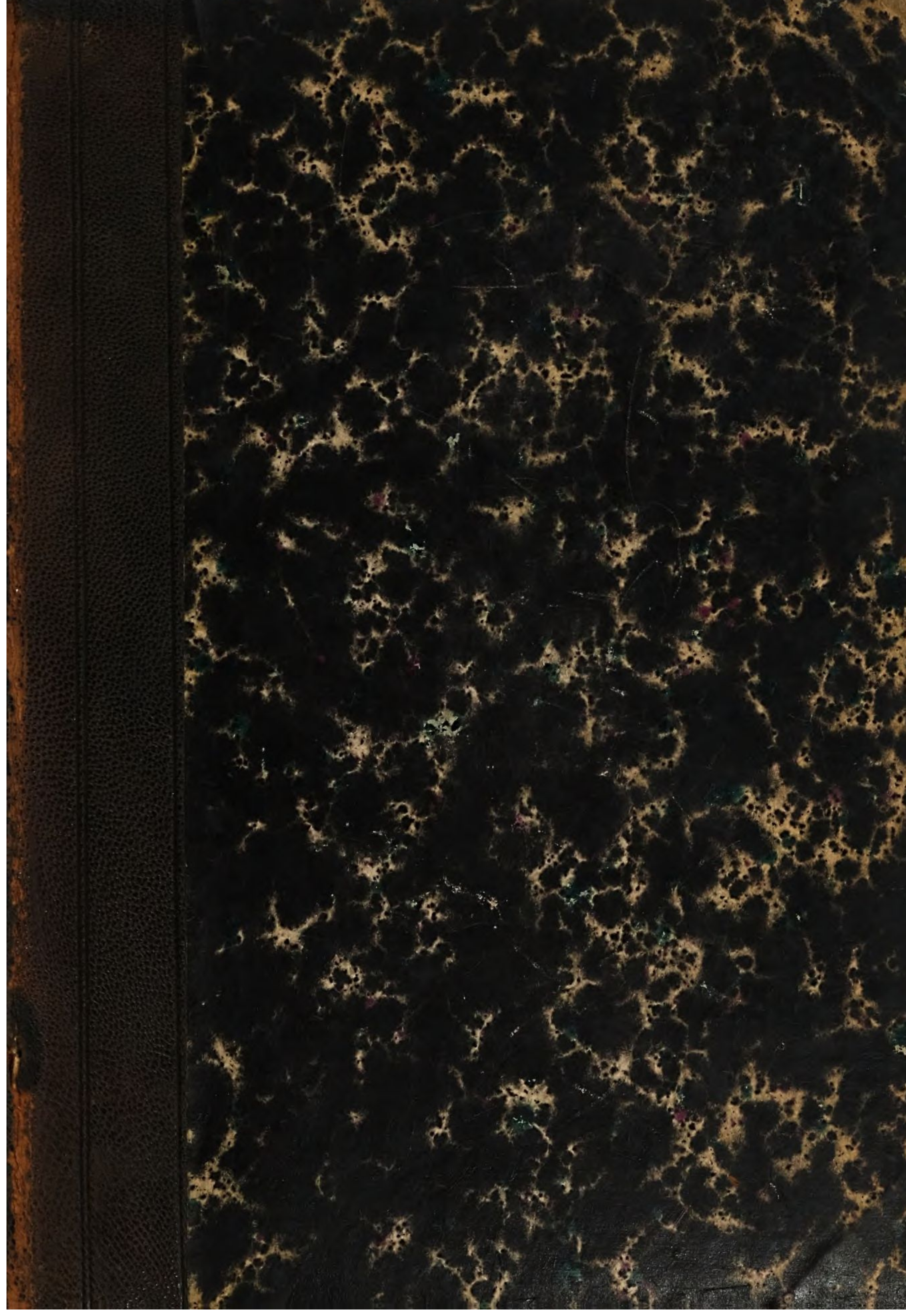




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By the same Author,

MRS. MAINWARING'S JOURNAL	1 vol.
BENVENUTA	1 vol.

LADY ALICE;

OR,

TWO SIDES OF A PICTURE.

BY

EMMA MARSHALL,

AUTHOR OF "MRS. MAINWARING'S JOURNAL," ETC.

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BERNHARD TAUCHNITZ

1882.

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“Look here, upon this picture, and on this.”—HAMLET.

“In other men we faults can spy,
And blame the mote that dims their eye,
Each little speck and blemish find;
To our own stronger errors blind.”—GAY.

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RHODA'S STORY.

“History, which may be called just and perfect history, is of three kinds, according to the object which it propoundeth, or pretendeth to represent; for it either representeth a time, or a person, or an action. The first we call chronicles, the second lives, and the third narrations or relations.

“Lives, if they be well written, propounding to themselves a person to represent, in whom actions both greater and smaller, public and private, have a commixture, must of necessity contain a true, native, and lively representation.”—

LORD BACON.

RHODA.

TUDOR VILLA,
January, 1870.

I WOKE on the morning of the 21st January just as the winter dawn was struggling into my room, with the half-sleepy conviction that something important was going to happen. Then, as my intelligence increased with the daylight, I remembered it was my birthday! Could that be important?—surely not—when nearer the fourth than the third decade, when a long-tailed seven must be written after the figure three. Thirty-seven—a middle-aged woman—why should I shirk the fact? why should I catch frantically at the receding garments of my youth, and dress like sweet seventeen as Dora Thornbury does? How she hates it when I boldly proclaim that for me the days of independence, dear middle-aged independence, are come; that I will never wear white tarlatane again, or make an erection of dubious plaits upon my head; or sit on low chairs before the fire, and play off pretty airs on any one who may happen to be looking at me and admiring me! Ah! this sounds, as I write it, very wise and philosophical; but how would it be if I had pretty light hair like Dora's and a complexion

still almost clear; a swan-like throat where the lines are yet but faintly traced; little regular white teeth, only helped out here and there by an intruder from Rogers'; a figure—well, yes, a figure which is, perhaps, a little stiffer than of old—but still tall, slender, and even graceful. I must be frank and confess I possess none of these temptations to keep up youthful airs. Long ago my dark hair took to lines of grey, and as to the rest, I never had any beauty of feature or figure. Certainly I had none on this cold wintry morning, when, as I caught sight of myself in the looking-glass, I saw reflected a face of the hue of the chill, sombre, smoky fog which was sweeping up from the river.

"Many happy returns of your birthday, Miss Rhoda." The voice was the voice of my dear old nurse and faithful servant, Mona, and she put down on my dressing-table a little white threefold vase, with a bunch of violets in each division.

"Thanks, Mona dear," I said, as we exchanged our birthday kiss; "isn't it a horrid morning? How is mother?"

"Oh, very well, and I can't persuade her to have her breakfast in bed on your birthday."

"Dear mother!" If anything keeps the heart young, it is a mother's love; and I thanked God for His gift in preserving it to me, as I thought of the many motherless women of my age, who are fighting the hard battle of life alone.

A bright fire was burning in the dining-room when I went downstairs, and my mother was already there. She is a sweet picture of old age, with her

pretty silvery hair, and cap closely tied with lilac ribbons, her black dress, and soft knitted shawl wrapped round her.

"Well, dear; there is a pile of letters for you," she said, "and here is my present."

"Oh, I am too old for birthday presents," I said; and yet I know my delighted smile must have contradicted the words, conventional words, like heaps of others. I have repeated them on every birthday for the last dozen years, and yet how disappointed I should be if no one remembered me, most of all my mother.

But this present was valuable. She had actually been photographed for the first time to please me, and I opened a pretty crimson velvet case, which would keep her from curious eyes, if I pleased, or stand upright before me, revealing the reflection of my mother, her knitting in her hand, her little work-basket by her side, and her head just raised as if about to speak to me.

"No one knows about it but Mona," she said; "is it good, Rhoda?"

"Yes, very good," I answered, "though the original is better."

It is very good, though like all, or almost all photographs it wanted the soul, which is crushed out of the unhappy sitter at the supreme moment by the head-rest, and is lost to the operator amidst his mechanical difficulties, contrivances, and appliances. Nevertheless the photograph is like my mother, quite enough like to be precious now, and infinitely precious one day. She was so pleased,

and hoped Oliffe would like it; Oliffe is our law-giver, and we are not supposed to admire or like anything without his leave. I made the coffee and tapped mother's egg, as I always do, and while she eat her breakfast in peace I read my letters between sips of coffee, and deliberate bites of toast and potted meat.

I gave mother the benefit of most of my letters as I proceeded—scraps of news interested her—not merely the stereotyped “happy returns of the day.” One friend, said, “Happy returns of your thirty-seventh birthday.”

Mother caught me up there. “No, Rhoda, only thirty-fifth.”

“Alas, mother!” I replied, “you are two years out in your calculations. You must make up your mind to a middle-aged daughter.” Mother was convinced against her will and submissive to the inexorable hand of Time, which scores our years for us whether we like it or not.

“You have heard from Nellie, I suppose? what does Nellie say?” my mother asked presently.

“The children are all better, and she hopes to get here at Easter. You can read her letter if you like.”

So I handed over Nellie's account of the number of inches by which Henry had outstripped Maude, and the peculiarity of the baby's teeth—the two in the top row coming before the two in the bottom, or *vice versa*, it does not matter which it is. Then I came to my brother Francis' letter. Poor dear fellow! he is sadly encumbered with a large turbu-

lent family, and his income as a provincial surgeon does not increase, as a few years ago he had hoped it would. At last I opened the envelope directed in my elder brother's hand. He had been away from Tulse Hill for some weeks with his two girls; and when I saw his writing I did not doubt that some directions for his housekeeper would be interwoven with his birthday wishes. Oliffe is not wont to write long letters—he has clearly no gift in that direction; I was therefore surprised to see a sheet covered from the first page to the fourth.

“What is it?” mother asked; for she recognised the writing, and feared something might be amiss with Oliffe.

I kept her in suspense a minute, till I had time to collect my scattered senses, which were driven to the winds by Oliffe's news. He is going to be married—to give his dear girls a second mother; and this time it is rank, as last time it was money, he is going to marry: Lady Alice St. Lou, the daughter of the late Earl of Clanmarina. It would have been satisfactory if Oliffe could have added, and sister to the present Earl; but that further honour was denied him: the old Earl left no male representative, and my future sister-in-law is his only surviving child.

Dear mother sat expectant, and when at last I left my seat and went round to her with Oliffe's letter, she felt it hard to realise the news.

“I hope she won't be very grand,” mother says. “I am sure I hope it will be for Oliffe's happiness. Does he say how old she is? I hope she will not

be too near the girls in age. Dear me, Rhoda, how strange it is to think that there should be a change at Tulse Hill after so many years! Why, how old is Bertha? Seventeen—yes, it is seventeen years since poor Sarah died. She was always kind to me.”

“And to me, too,” I said; and the vision of my dead sister-in-law rose before me, large, muscular, and tall; twelve years older than Oliffe, to whom she had brought the large fortune of a cotton manufacturer, and the profit of a coal-mine a few miles off, which was an ever-increasing source of wealth to my brother; for Oliffe is a very rich man, and on the whole makes a good use of his wealth. He is unvaryingly kind to mother; this house belongs to him, and is, of course, rent free to us.

There were, as I supposed, some directions for Mrs. Hall at Tulse Hill; and after mother and I had discussed the great news in all its bearings, I went to deliver my message, and left mother to write to Oliffe.

Just as I was starting on my errand, I met, as I knew I should, Dora Thornbury. So kind, so affectionate—I wish I could love her better, but I can't; and yet we are friends by the common consent of the world at large, and our own also. We are the same standing as to age; we were children together, and at school together, and now here we are in the table-land of middle age together. Dora brought me such a pretty present, and I accepted it graciously, although I shall never wear it; those fair blue beads would not look well on my dark throat.

"I bought them in London," Dora says anxiously, as I opened the box and held the necklace up by the snap. "They are quite the thing now, Rhoda. I saw Mrs. Barclay with a set like them at the opera."

"Oh," I hastened to reply, "they are only too pretty for me; but thank you so much. Will you like to walk up to Tulse Hill with me?"

"Should I not like it of all things," said Dora; "but I can't come: I have promised Hester Appleton to drive with her to Bromsgrove. Oh! I am so sorry; I never dreamed you would ask me to go with you; I thought you were always busy of a morning."

"So I am," I said hastily, remembering how often I had rebuffed poor Dora, when she had come to dawdle away her morning in my room—"So I am; but I have to go up early to Tulse Hill, to see the housekeeper. We can walk as far as the bridge together, can't we?"

"Oh yes; and," looking at her watch, "I shall have time to go a little farther, if you will let me."

Of course I said I would let her, and we set off together, Dora rambling on about her guest, Hester Appleton; about how trying her mother and Agnes were, and what a fuss her father had made about her going to the Hunt Ball, and a great deal more in the same strain. I had quite made up my mind that I would keep the family news to myself, when Dora suddenly said:

"When is Mr. Heathcote coming home? I heard papa say they wanted him dreadfully at the meet-

ing about the hospistal yesterday. He has been away a long time: how you must miss him," and Dora gave the slightest possible sigh. "Sarah and Bertha never wrote as they promised; I have written to them twice, but as they don't take any notice of my letters, I shall not write again."

"Of course not; and they are coming home on Thursday," I said. "I don't think we are great correspondents as a family."

"You are not," Dora says. "I know you are not; such scrubby little letters as I get from you; but I would rather have one little than not hear at all; you know that, Rhoda. No one can care more for your letters than I do. But tell me about Oliffe—I mean Mr. Heathcote. I should think he was tired of a place like Leamington by this time."

It seemed unkind to keep back my news, so I made a desperate plunge, and said shortly, "Oliffe is going to be married to Lady Alice St. Lou!"

Dora's start was so perceptible, and her colour changed so rapidly, that I was sorry for her. It had flashed across me sometimes that she would not dislike to be the lady of Tulse Hill, and Oliffe at one time paid her some attention after his own fashion. I had thought also that Colonel Thornbury and her mother cherished a hope that at last Dora might succeed poor Sarah, but I did not think the shaft had struck deep. I saw that Dora struggled to speak as if my news were a matter of indifference to her; but her voice had an ominous tremble in it, and her little laugh was sad, and set in the minor key of disappointment.

"Lady Alice! how grand you will all be!" she said. "I suppose I may tell this at home."

"Yes; and abroad too if you like," I said. "It will save me the trouble."

I spoke lightly, but in my heart I was sorry, very sorry. Unlike me, Dora has had so many skirmishes in the field of love; she has often seemed on the very border of the promised land of matrimony, and then the bubble has burst! Unlike me—yes, very unlike. As I parted from Dora, and crossed the bridge to pursue my way to Tulse Hill, I fell into meditation on the past, and in that past I am guiltless of what are commonly called *affaires du cœur*. When I was eighteen, I think I loved poor Jack Masters, and he loved me in his own boyish, frank, sailor fashion; but he never came back from his first voyage, and there is nothing left of that but a sort of tender regret, for the young life snapped short. As I walked up the road, skirted on either side, after the first half mile, by the Tulse Hill plantations, I went back to the bright summer evening when Jack and I walked home after one of poor Sarah's heavy dinners—afternoon parties and pleasant seven o'clock teas were then unknown—and I wondered a little if Jack would know me on my thirty-seventh birthday, and wondered how much I was altered. I suppose Oliffe's marriage and Dora's white face have set me off on the sentimental track, a road on which I am not given to travel.

I entered the Tulse Hill grounds by a small gate, of which we always have a key. The thought

struck me as I opened it, that when the new mistress comes things may change, and I may not be so entirely at home here. The narrow path through the plantation was strewn with dead leaves, and here and there, under the shelter of a tree, a small primrose smiled at me from its wrinkled green leaves, just like a promise of better things to come. I wound along the path till I came to the opening by the ha-ha fence, and went round it to the gate leading on to the lawn.

I always stop here to look back at the view below. Distance lends enchantment to Kingsholme: seen from Tulse Hill, its closely packed irregular streets show only gabled roofs, clustering round the big Abbey Church, with the river winding like a line of steel-blue colour through the fields, and losing itself at last in an abrupt curve close under the Martock Hills which shut in the valley on the eastern side, and give Kingsholme a good reputation as a place protected from easterly blasts.

The Abbey Church raised its lofty tower against the pale-blue January sky, and the spire of St. John's looked taller than usual, seen through the veil of mist which the sun will not have time entirely to disperse before it sinks low in the horizon, and leaves the fogs to rise from the river as they please. Tulse Hill stands, as its name implies, high above the town, and is an imposing house on the whole. As I went up to the large front entrance, Ruby, an old retriever, rose to meet me with a sleepy whine, which was the last note of a yawn, and rubbed his black nose against my hand.

"Poor dear Ruby, you are getting into years like the rest of us," I said, "and you are to have a young mistress, or rather a new mistress very soon, for I don't know whether she is young, or old, or middle-aged."

The great door was half open, and I passed into the wide square hall where two housemaids were rubbing, and dusting, and cleaning windows, which I took as a sign that Mrs. Hall was in possession of my news. So it proved: the good housekeeper came pattering downstairs as she heard my voice, her round body tightly swathed in brown holland like the great arm-chairs in the drawing-room.

"There, Miss Heathcote! I declare I am glad you are come. I am that upset by the master's news, I don't know where I am, on my head or my heels; and they are coming home on Thursday, and I am behind-hand with all the cleaning. But, dear me, miss, step into my room or the master's library, there is a bit of fire lighted there."

I preceded Mrs. Hall to a room at the end of the hall, down two steps, and opened the door of Oliffe's study. Poor Sarah's portrait, painted in oils, in a black velvet dress and extensive white lace berthe, looked down at me. Big portraits ought to be ideal to be tolerable. This portrait of Sarah was certainly not ideal; perhaps the artist, of some reputation in his day, found it impossible to produce anything but the precise copy of the tall, stout, honest-faced woman, who looked out on the world as she found it, and if never pretending to

be gentle, or what we should call lady-like, was at least kindly as she was outspoken and sincere. I thought as I answered her gaze how all this money was hers, and wondered what she would say, if she could speak, in reply to Mrs. Hall's exclamation:

"And a lady of title, too, Miss Heathcote! Well, I think of the poor dear young ladies; I hope they won't be rode over!"

I laughed and said it was very unlikely, and told Mrs. Hall that I did not think "the master," as she called him, would fail to consider his children's interests in this second marriage; whereupon Mrs. Hall, after much fumbling, brought out from her capacious pocket a letter and a pocket-handkerchief—with the latter she wiped her eyes, and then handed the former to me, saying:

"That is what the master's letter says, Miss Heathcote; it is very short, and he says I am to apply to you for further orders."

"Yes," I said, glancing over the half-dozen lines which announced to Mrs. Hall that her master might be expected on Thursday, and that the carriage was to meet the 4.30 train from London, ending with, "I am about to be married to Lady Alice St. Lou; you must prepare for workmen at the beginning of next week, as I contemplate some improvements in several rooms."

"Work-people!" Mrs. Hall exclaimed, as I read aloud in an undertone. "Yes, I don't doubt the place will be nicely pulled about; it was good enough for the poor mistress, the drawing-room paper was a guinea a piece the year she was took

away, and there is not a stain on it, so little have the large rooms been used. The master, perhaps, does not mean the drawing-room."

It was my turn now to refer to my letter, and I read aloud for Mrs. Hall's information that the drawing-room was doomed, and that Miss Heathcote's room was to be changed, as it was wanted for a boudoir and was the most available for the purpose.

"Turn out Miss Sarah!" ejaculated Mrs. Hall; "I never could have believed it. The room her poor mamma kissed her in that last night, when she was a little thing of three years old. Oh, Miss Heathcote, I think I shall give up—I do indeed!"

"Nonsense, Mrs. Hall," I replied cheerily, "you would never desert the ship after all these years? Who could keep the crew in order if you did? No; we must all make the best of it, and determine to think Lady Alice is the most charming person. And now I must go into the conservatory and get some flowers for mother."

"Tucker was going to call for orders, Miss Heathcote, about the carriage. If Mrs. Heathcote wishes for a drive to-day, Tucker can bring down the flowers."

"No, we shall not want the carriage to-day. Mother has a little cold, and I dare not let her go out; and I prefer carrying the flowers myself."

So I parted from Mrs. Hall, who returned to her pressing avocations; and turning into the conservatory, I took the large scissors from the nail behind the door and helped myself to a goodly number of

camellias and ferns. As I clipped blossom after blossom, I smiled as I thought that if Oliffe had been at home I should not have dared to lay hands on the flowers. Oliffe *gives* by the hand of Mackenzie the gardener, but he never allows us to *take* anything. Kind as he is, he always makes us feel it is royal kindness—a favour which, were he so minded, he might withhold, and we could not complain. Oliffe holds sway over every one—all womankind especially. Will it be so with Lady Alice also? Will she be a queen consort or a submissive wife? Time will show, and time alone.

I am myself conscious that I am under Oliffe's hand. I bluster a little when he treats mother coolly, and comes in to an early dinner on committee days an hour late, and complains if the plates are cold. I make a show of resistance when he makes use of me for the girls' sake, but I always yield—always. I grumble to mother, and hurt her feelings, I know, sometimes. I growl to Nellie in my letters, and she always responds by telling me it is my own fault. I even sound a note of complaint to Janet, Francis' much-tried wife; but I am careful what I say there, for Oliffe's great prosperity is a bitter pill for them to swallow, struggling on as they do to keep their heads above the stream, and almost engulfed from time to time.

In my heart of hearts, too, I am proud of Oliffe: he can be so infinitely gracious and kind; and if mother is ill, then I feel his real value.

I left off here the other evening, and found the

occupation, at this time of family revolution, so congenial that I intend to go on with the story.

Dora Thornbury has always told me I have a gift for writing, and that I might be a popular author if I chose; indeed, she persists that I am even now famous, because I have translated two or three little German stories which have found niches in magazines unknown to fame, and assures me that my papers written for the Essay Club are considered beautiful.

I wonder if every one is so aggravated by weak praise as I am. If it came from some great authority I should walk on stilts for the rest of my life; but when little people sound a trumpet about little performances, there is a feeling of a penny showman about it all. I can't smile and look pleased; I feel grim and disagreeable. I have the same sensation when any one I care very much about is held up as a mark for popular applause, not really appreciative valuation for worth.

There are just two or three people in Kingsholme whose friendship I prize and feel honoured by. Why will Dora drag their names in, on every conceivable opportunity, quote their speeches and opinions, and all, I believe, to please me? Perhaps I ought to be ashamed to confess I am on the rack all the time she is talking—I do hate it so.

I went to these friends aforesaid—the Boddingtons—to-day to communicate my news about Oliffe. Mr. Boddington strokes my fur the right way always, and Margaret is also a person with whom I am thoroughly at ease. They have not lived here

more than three years, being people at large in the world, and they have led somewhat of a vagrant life. Charles Boddington writes a good deal for magazines—not those in which I have hung out my colours, but magazines counting on their staff great and distinguished names. Margaret is a musician—thorough, complete; and the three children are like ideal children: they are never troublesome, or in the wrong place; two girls taught by father and mother as no schools or high-pressure governesses could teach, and likely to become women of which Kingsholme ought to be proud. They are yet but children—twelve and thirteen; and then there is small Willy, who is scarcely nine. They all love me, at least I think so, call me Rhoda, and do much to keep me young. Father and mother are both good walkers, and they have educated me in that respect. I did not do much more than walk up to Tulse Hill, and hover about the streets, till I knew the Boddingtons, and now I know the delight of a good stretch of ten miles, whereby I get rid of superfluous energy sometimes.

Charles Boddington entrusts me from time to time to write out his manuscript for the press when he is hurried for copy, and I am thus often engaged of a morning, when poor Dora finds her absence is more desired than her presence.

Oliffe and the two girls came home, as we expected, on Thursday. On that very evening the well-known knock was heard, and I ran out to admit my brother. Mother can never bear that he should be kept a moment at the door.

We were all conscious when he came in that this was no ordinary return; we all three felt that great things had happened since we parted. It struck me forcibly how young Oliffe looked as he put his arm round mother, and kissed her again and again. No outsider would believe that his fiftieth birthday has come and gone.

"Well, my dear Oliffe, you had my letter, I hope. I wrote as soon as we received your news that you were to bring me another daughter. You had my letter, dear——" for Oliffe was turning out his pocket-book.

"Oh yes, mother. We were both so pleased with it. And see, I have brought you one from Alice. She wished me to give it to you myself; and she sent her love to you, Rhoda."

"What is she like, Oliffe? Sit down and tell us; and shall Mona make you a cup of coffee?" mother said anxiously; "ring the bell, Rhoda."

The coffee was ordered, and then Oliffe settled himself in his particular chair, opposite mother, and watched her complacently while she read her letter.

"Very nice, very kind," mother said at last, handing on the note to me.

I expected to see a monogram and dainty sheet of paper, but I was disappointed. The round, clear hand apparently disdained ornament of every kind. As I read the few lines, my ideal of Alice changed.

"Tell us all about her, Oliffe," mother said, taking up her soft white knitting, and plying her needles vigorously. "Where and how did you meet Alice?"

Oliffe did not hurry himself, but began between sips of the coffee Mona herself brought, with—

“You remember Mrs. Mitchell, the widow of the doctor here——”

“Of course I do,” mother said; “but what can she have to do with Lady Alice?”

Everything, it seemed; for as Oliffe unfolded his story we learned that he had called on old Mrs. Mitchell for old sake's sake at Leamington; that at her house he had been introduced to Lady Alice St. Lou, who had been living with the old lady since the Earl's death. There had been some family connection between Lady Alice's mother and Dr. Mitchell.

Mother seemed to take up a thread here of past memories, and I think she and I breathed more freely as we found the Earl's daughter thus brought nearer to our own circle, as a relation of the good doctor of days gone by. “The girls were a great deal with Lady Alice from the first, and Bertha and she rode together,” Oliffe said.

“Ah, my dear Oliffe, *is* she very young?” mother interposed.

“Well, no; she was thirty last month.”

“A chicken to me,” I exclaimed; “seven years younger.”

“She looks younger,” Oliffe said. “She is fair, and you know, Rhoda, that makes all the difference.”

“I make no secret of my age,” I said; “any one may know it who pleases. But do go on, Oliffe.”

"Bertha rode with Alice, and I joined them. We had pleasant evenings together, and read a play of Shakespeare's with two or three other friends, and so it came about. I felt such a friend was precisely what the two girls needed; so cultivated and refined, and so good, I may say religious."

I shrugged my shoulders; I don't like that word. Oliffe's sharp eye detected what I felt.

"When I say religious, I don't mean that Alice professes much or talks much about sacred things; but she is—well, I will say no more; she will soon show you what she is, for we shall be married this day month."

"So soon!" I exclaimed.

"There is nothing to wait for," Oliffe rejoined, "and I hope, Rhoda, you will come with the girls to the wedding—a very quiet one she wishes it to be; only two cousins of hers from Oxford and Mrs. Mitchell's married daughter are to be invited."

"Not the Earl of Clanmarina," I said.

"Certainly not," Oliffe replied in his most emphatic voice. "Alice has very little communication with him. He has succeeded to the title and to the estate, which is exceedingly small, and has made no friendly overtures to Alice."

"Is he her first cousin?" I asked.

"No: her first cousin's child, I think."

Oliffe went on to unroll his plans. I played a very important part in them. I was to take care of the girls after the marriage. I was to see that the workpeople did not waste their time, and that all things were in readiness for the return of the bride

and bridegroom at Easter. Soon I discovered that Sarah and Bertha were to take up their abode with us till their father came back from his tour. I heard mother assenting and agreeing, and I knew I must agree too, and I made no protest this time. I felt it was useless.

Early the next morning the two girls arrived: Sarah muffled up in furs and wraps, and getting out of the little pony carriage with a slow step; Bertha quick and alert; but both full of the coming change.

"Oh, Aunt Rhoda, she is delightful," Bertha exclaims, "but not quite in your way, I think. Have you seen her photograph?"

"It is a very bad photograph, that is why papa would not let you see it," Sarah said, as I disclaimed all acquaintance with Alice's photograph; "but I brought mine to show you and Grannie."

"How fearfully cold it is," Sarah continued, with a shiver.

"I can't think how you can muffle up like that, as if you were a hundred," Bertha exclaimed, and then sitting down on a low stool before the fire she said:

"She is so nice, Aunt Rhoda."

I looked at the portrait of Lady Alice doubtfully, and was silent.

"What do you think of it, Aunt Rhoda? Do speak!"

"A good sensible face, but—well—not pretty, is it?"

"Not exactly pretty, perhaps," Bertie continued,

“but so *distingué*; and just think, Aunt Rhoda, how nice to have—well, to have one’s mother Lady Alice. Why, we all think a great deal of Mrs. Charlesworth, and she is only the Honourable. The Harrisons won’t be able to hold their heads above us now.”

“Do pray ask Bertha not to talk such nonsense, Aunt Rhoda; it is so vulgar,” said Sarah in a querulous voice. “Lady Alice was always snubbing her at Leamington; it is so vulgar.”

I could not dissent from Sarah’s opinion, and I foresaw that my sister-in-law’s rank would bring me into trouble. On the whole I think I prefer the manufacturer’s to the earl’s daughter. I knew that Bertha would need a great deal of repression on this head, for Bertha has a touch, a pretty strong one too, of vulgarity, poor child. It shows out in her love of finery, and in her fine airs to people whom she chooses to think beneath her. Now I know she will plume her poor little wings and rise upon this accession of dignity. Sarah has quick perceptions and a certain *savoir faire*, which shows her the folly of Bertha’s pretensions: but she is difficult to get on with peaceably. Her theme is health; she is not strong and thinks herself an invalid, her temper is none of the best, and both girls had very little advantage in their governess—a commonplace showy woman, who lived at Tulse Hall for seven years, and about whom I had some misgivings—happily unfounded—for she departed on the day Bertha was seventeen and soon after married the hard-working curate of a London parish,

to whom she had been engaged for some time. Mother came in just as Sarah was lodging her complaint against Bertha, and both girls greeted her rapturously. Then the same story was gone over again, and the photograph examined by the help of mother's spectacles, which were rubbed clear for the first sight of Lady Alice's likeness. It is always a bright place in both girls' characters, their love and tenderness to mother. For this I forgive them much, and contrast them favourably with Francis' children and even Nellie's. No doubt they take this from their father, who never, with all his little faults and weaknesses, fails in affectionate attention to his mother. The girls stayed to our early dinner, and their father called for them at three o'clock in the carriage, and I went to St. Michael's Terrace to see my friends. I found the children in a state of excitement, jumping and racing about in the hall, ready dressed for a walk.

"Who do you think is come, Rhoda? Guess. Father's most particular friend, who has been out in New Zealand for some years. He was at Oxford with father, and is almost as clever."

"Yes, and we are all going a walk together; not mother, she has got a bad headache. She won't want you to sit with her—she is too bad for that. You will come with us, Rhoda?—say yes!"

"Say yes, Rhoda, for Willy has a cold, and is quite enough company for mother."

"Children, please let me get into the drawing-room," I pleaded. "I must see your mamma first, even if I come with you afterwards." And now the

drawing-room door opened gently, and Willy's little curly head was thrust out:

"If it is you, Rhoda, you are to come in, and Lily and May are not to talk so loud. I am taking care of mother."

I found Margaret stretched out on a sofa, and saw at once any attempt to companionise her would be cruelty. I bent over her and kissed her, and dipped a handkerchief in the eau-de-cologne and water which was on the table in a cup, drew down the blinds of the nearest window, and told her not to speak.

"Is it not tiresome?" she whispered. "This is one of my worst headaches, and David Murray is come—you must have heard Charlie talk of him. My only hope is to be quite quiet till dinner, and then I may be able to come down; if I can't, will you take my place at the table?"

"I don't like leaving mother alone twice in one week, it is one of my rules not to do so; but I will break it for you," I said. "It is no kindness to stay with you now, is it?"

"No," with a rueful smile; "I am better alone. Willy will stay quietly with me; he is deep in a new 'Aunt Judy.'"

Willy was lying on his face on the rug, his chin propped up on his hands, and the book open before him, and so I left him with his mother.

Lily and May were waiting for me outside.

"Father and Mr. Murray are gone on: make haste, Rhoda, please. I think we are going to Hay Hill."

As we went out of the house I saw Charles Boddington disappearing round the corner of the terrace with a man who towered above his slight middle height considerably, and who walked with a long, somewhat awkward stride.

The children and I followed at a respectful distance, and our leaders seemed quite oblivious of our existence. On they went through Longbrook Street, past the Abbey, through the quaint old Grey Friars' Walk, then threading some narrow dirty streets, and at last to the Friar's Bridge, which spans the river in the opposite direction to the one Dora Thornbury and I had crossed on the way to Tulse Hill. On the bridge Charlie and his friend paused, and we joined company. They were both looking intently down the river, which was flowing on serenely with the bright sky of the winter's afternoon reflected on its quiet breast; stately ships or large craft of any kind cannot come up the Culme at this point, and little boats have to be wary of its currents where it takes a sudden turn towards the distant hills.

"Father," Lily said, springing towards him, "we thought we should never get up to you."

"You walked so fast, father," May said.

Charlie turned from his contemplation of the river, and smiled at his little girls.

"Too bad, Lily and May," he said, taking the hand nearest to him in a loving grasp.

"Well, Rhoda," he went on, turning to me in the easy brotherly fashion which is so pleasant, "let me introduce you to Mr. Murray—the old friend to

the new," he said, touching Mr. Murray's shoulder. "Miss Heathcote, Mr. Murray."

The tall man leaning upon the parapet of the bridge, and looking down into the river's depth, drew himself up and bowed, rather stiffly I thought, in answer to the introduction. After this we proceeded on our way, Lily's hand in her father's, May's in mine, and the stranger in the middle. When we reached the summit of May Hill our spirits rose. On the smooth grassy plain which spread over the crest of May Hill we trod with lighter steps, and Lily and May challenged their father to a race.

"Come on, Murray," Charlie said, "let us give the children a start, and see who will win." Off went the children, their long hair flying back in the wind, and then the two friends gave chase. Charlie is swift of foot, but he had no chance against the ostrich-like strides of his rival. The two children were, of course, quickly outstripped, and Mr. Murray was at the fragment of grey limestone which was the goal a full half minute before his friend.

"Always first in the race, old David," I heard Charlie say as I came up; "it's the same story."

A strange expression hovered over Mr. Murray's face as he rejoined: "Never first, you mean."

Then he turned suddenly to me, and said:

"You know, I dare say, our friend is addicted to chaff?"

"You were first in this race," I said quietly.

"Ah! yes, in this one—a short and sharp trial."

"Try again, papa, with us; do, father," the chil-

dren entreated; and Charlie, with a ludicrous gesture of a martyr, set off with Lily and May.

"Boddington is as young as ever," was my companion's remark. "Could you believe he was my senior? These small lithe people always wear well, even if they work like horses."

Mr. Murray's question made me look at him more intently. Till this moment I had only seen a tall man, with legs and arms loosely knit, and a face which was covered with a good deal of lightish hair, streaked here and there with grey.

I now made up my mind that life had not gone smoothly with him, and that sundry lines round his deep-set eyes told of trouble. There was also a ring in his low voice which did not tell of happiness or the zest of successful work. He was not difficult to get on with, and we found many subjects of interest in Charlie and his work, his children, and his wife.

"A lucky man," he said more than once, "and he deserves to be."

"Yes, indeed," I rejoined warmly, for this was not like Dora Thornbury's praise; it came from one who had known Charlie longer than I had, by many a year. "Sometimes I fear he may overtax his powers, but he gets a good rest every summer."

"Ah! rest is a grand thing; we are none of us like clocks, that can be wound up for years without breaking down."

"They do break down sometimes," I said, laughing, "and watches get their main-springs broken."

My companion turned quickly upon me.

"Main-springs, yes, and they are not easily mended."

"Never mended," I rejoined; "they must be replaced."

It was a very pleasant walk after this. Charles Boddington was in his best mood, and how good his best is, only those who knew him well can understand. Mr. Murray played upon him with a skilful hand, and brought out so much from the treasure-house.

When we returned to St. Michael's Terrace we found poor Margaret had retreated to her room, and had left a message with the maid, Pearse, that she would be very glad if I could return to dinner. I went home as quickly as I could, and found mother by the firelight with her letters, which had arrived by the afternoon post.

We have a good many letters now, as naturally every relative and friend finds something to say about Oliffe's marriage. "Nellie says she must bring Lena at Easter as well as Maude," mother remarked, handing me the letter.

"*Must*," I exclaimed; "this house is certainly a sort of family hotel; and what is to be done about Sarah and Bertha? You know, mother, we have promised to take care of them after the wedding."

"Yes," said mother, with a sigh, "we must manage it somehow. I must speak to Mona."

"Mona can't add a room to the house," I said.

"I really think it is too much, the way they all make use of us."

"My dear Rhoda," mother said, "my house is home to all my children and grandchildren while I live. I wish poor Janet would write more cheerfully. I have heard from her too, but I think you had better not read that now."

"Oh, I am used to the grumblings and little side-hits at the peculiarities of the Heathcotes, and the smallness of their income, and the contrast there is in the lives of the same family," I said, taking my sister-in-law's letter, and finding in its first page exactly what I had prophesied.

Presently mother said:

"Oliffe is coming in this evening for an hour; he has sent a message down to say so. He has to come into the town to see Mr. Blunt about some business."

"Oh, I am very glad he is coming," I exclaimed, "for Margaret Boddington is ill with one of her headaches, and has asked me to take her place at dinner to-night, but not till half-past seven. A friend of Charlie's is staying with them; he arrived to-day. We have been a walk together up May Hill; but I am so glad Oliffe is coming this evening, for I did not quite like leaving you alone."

"My dear," mother said, as she always does say, "I can endure my own company for an evening very well. I shall write some letters, and enjoy a little quiet talk with dear Oliffe."

"And not want me at all; that is a comfort for me!" I rejoined.

Mother and I understand each other so well: nor can I want anything while I have her. I made

tea and read the *Evening Mail* aloud, and then went to dress. I found Mona in my room, trying to reduce my books and papers to order.

"Quick, Mona," I said, "get me out my black velvet with the white lace—I am going to dine at St. Michael's Terrace—and leave my books to take care of themselves."

"Your black velvet? Why you will be known by that dress," Mona said. "Is there company at Mr. Boddington's, pray?"

"Oh yes, good company, Mona; Mr. Boddington's oldest friend, who has been at the Antipodes for years."

"And is another bookworm like himself, I suppose. Well, there, I think there may be too much of write, write, and read, read. I would rather you took to dancing, as Miss Nellie did, though she did wear one out about her dress."

"Ah, you see, Mona, I give no trouble, but go on in my dear old black velvet; and yet there is no satisfying you."

"Put something in your hair, pray," Mona urged. "A red rose, now, would look well."

"So it would; but red roses are unfortunately not in flower now. My cap will do, however."

"Your cap! why, one would think you were sixty at least. Anyway, take this one with the lace on it. And let me pin on a bow of scarlet ribbon."

"Anything, but make haste," I urged, wrapping myself in my waterproof, over a thick shawl, and tying my hat down with a veil.

I just rushed in to kiss mother, and then I was

off, for it was twenty minutes past seven. At the door I met Oliffe.

"Rhoda, where are you going?" he exclaimed.

"To dine with the Boddingtons," I replied. "I am so glad you are come to see mother. I am late, so good-night."

"But, Rhoda, you are not walking alone out to dinner?"

"I always do, and why not? I walk to church, and I am quite independent."

"Yes, but——" I heard Oliffe say as I walked off. I dare say he finished his sentence to mother.

It was a pleasant evening, though we missed Margaret's music. At least I did, for I can play the bass of a duet with her tolerably, and Charlie accompanies us with the violoncello.

To-night we had no music; but it was delightful to sit quiet and hear the two friends talk—better than a week's reading it is to hear the conversation of two really able men.

These two are a great contrast. Charlie has the most wonderful memory and power of adaptation, as well as the gift of expressing himself gracefully on any subject. Mr. Murray is more rugged, he hesitates sometimes, stops for words, gets up and paces the room, and altogether forgets the presence of others. He was first in mathematics, and Charlie in classics, in the same year; though both took good places in the class-list on different subjects.

"Since you came to England," Charlie asked Mr. Murray, "have you seen anything of Wynne? He has got through very well. I was surprised to

see his name in the class-list at all, still more surprised at his place."

"Why were you surprised?" Mr. Murray asked.

"Well, I don't know. He was so much of a swell, and so languid, one never expected work from him. But all this time you have not answered my question as to whether you have seen him, Murray."

"No, I have not seen him," was the short reply.

"He was some relation of yours, I fancy; and, by-the-bye, Rhoda, he is a nephew of some Lady Clanmarina, and therefore must be a relation of the coming lady at Tulse Hill."

Here was a mine sprung at once which drew me into the conversation, and Charlie and I forthwith rushed into domestic politics, and more interesting ones were left to take care of themselves.

I went up at half-past ten, as usual, to put on my wraps, and just looked in on Margaret. She was better, and begged me to tell her how we had got on.

"Don't you like David Murray?" she asked.

"He is so unpretentious, you would never find out how much there is in him, and he is so brave and good. He is positively going to accept a mastership at one of the public schools; I will tell you more about him to-morrow. We shall see you to-morrow," she repeated as she raised her heavy head for a kiss. "I can't talk any more now."

Then I went down into the hall. The two gentlemen were there.

"Good-night," I said.

"Good-night," said Charlie. "You have no escort, I suppose, as usual. I know you like to be left to do as you please."

"A nice excuse for laziness," said Mr. Murray.

"Not at all," I replied; "he is never allowed to go out of an evening. I can run home in less than five minutes."

"Will you let me come with you?" Mr. Murray said, taking a huge Inverness cape from the stand, and flinging it over his shoulders.

"No, thanks," I said, so decidedly I suppose, that no further effort was made, and as I looked back, I saw the Inverness returning to its place on the peg.

Did my ear deceive me?

"Strong-minded, eh, Boddington?"

And the answer, with Charlie's merry laugh:

"Oh, very!"

LADY ALICE'S STORY.

“Yet sets she not her soul so steadily
Above, that she forgets her ties to earth,
But her whole thought would almost seem to be
How to make glad, one lowly human hearth;
For with a gentle courage she doth strive
In thought, and word, and feeling, so to live
As to make earth next heaven; and her heart
Herein doth show a most exceeding worth,
That, bearing in our frailty her just part,
She hath not shrunk from evils of this life,
But hath gone calmly forth into the strife,
And all its sins and sorrows hath withstood
With lofty strength of patient womanhood.”

LOWELL.

LADY ALICE.

TULSE HILL,
May, 1870.

THE events of the last few months have followed each other so quickly that now I have time to breathe and collect my scattered thoughts, I think it will do me good to write an old-fashioned journal of my new life. If I had a mother, I should write to her instead; but the little personal details which I shall record here would not interest my cousin Hilda or Mary Forrester, and they are my only real correspondents.

I have so few relations, and I feel it strange to be dropped down amongst a family with widespread branches and ramifications. I am trying to learn them all by heart—yes, and to take them into my heart too, if they will let me.

I think the Heathcotes are unusually given to discuss each other's affairs, and speak of one another with a freedom and sharpness which surprises me. But, then, I have never been one of a large family, and cannot judge.

As I look back on the dull November day, when I was standing all unconsciously on the threshold of the greatest change in my life, I can scarcely

believe it is only five months ago. Cousin Mary and I were seated in her cosy little drawing-room, both agreeing it was too damp and cheerless to go out that afternoon. Persis, the grey cat, sat blinking before the large bright fire, and poor Peter, the ancient pug, lay outstretched at my feet. I was getting cousin Mary's knitting right, and talking little nothings to her, as I picked up errant stitches in the labyrinth of a pattern called in the knitting-book "Rosemary."

"Will you go out here this winter, dear?" Cousin Mary asks. "I see you have no crape on your new winter dress."

I had no inclination for Leamington society, and shook my head.

"No," I replied, "I will go out with you anywhere, but not independently, Cousin Mary; I am very happy to be quiet."

"But, my dear," she urged, "you are too young to tie yourself to an old woman like me. Your day is yet to come, and your rank will give you an entrance into the best society."

Just at this moment Cousin Mary's maid brought in a card on the salver, and was followed into the room by Oliffe.

"Who is it, Alice?" Cousin Mary said hurriedly. "I can't see the name."

I looked over her shoulder, and read—

"MR. HEATHCOTE."

Well, that was the beginning, and Cousin Mary's heart warmed to the courteous stranger who

claimed the right of acquaintance for the sake of her husband, who had, he said, attended him when a little child at Kingsholme, and had left there a name which was honoured and respected.

We had daily interviews after this. Oliffe brought the two girls to see us, and Bertha and he joined me in my rides. Pleasant, sociable evenings followed, and at last Oliffe asked me to be his wife. I seemed to have no doubt from the first that I would say yes. He won upon me daily, and I longed to help him with the girls. I had no one to consult, and no one to be either very much pleased or the reverse. I wrote to my cousin Lord Clanmarina as a matter of form; but he was in Egypt, and his reply was delayed, so that I was Alice Heathcote before it reached me. Geoffrey and Hilda came to the wedding, and Geoffrey gave me away. Rhoda brought the two girls, and we had the quietest possible wedding; and much, I think, to poor little Bertha's disappointment, I wore a plain white silk, and a bonnet, and I have returned to sober greys and blacks, as my dear father has scarcely been dead a year. I think I am also a disappointment to the Kingsholme people. They flock here to call upon me in their very smartest dresses, and I feel like a grey pigeon amongst them.

We had a delightful time in Italy after our marriage, and now we have been settled down at home for a month, and the time is May—the May of the poets. Nothing can exceed the loveliness of my new home. Oliffe has made everything so

pretty for me within, and without Nature is doing her part with a royal, lavish hand. Never were lilacs so full of blossom, never were golden laburnums so profuse in hanging out their tassels, and surely never did thrushes and blackbirds sing as they do by my window, in the woods behind the house. Then, from this room, what a view I have of hills and river and the town below, with the grey Abbey towers standing up with majesty and grace!

Oliffe is so kind and thoughtful. I have been so little accustomed to the sort of chivalrous attention he gives me, and I feel as if I could never repay it.

I brought my dear faithful Kelly with me: she and I can never part. She knew and served my mother, and helped me to nurse my dear father in his long and trying illness. Cousin Mary said once or twice that she hoped I should find no difficulty with Kelly in my new home with the other servants; but I asked Oliffe's opinion about bringing her, and he said of course I must do so.

Mrs. Hall, the housekeeper, saves me all trouble in the way of management, and if I see some things which need alteration I will not begin too soon to speak of them.

Sarah's invalid habits are, I think, too much encouraged, and she is so querulous and easily upset. Her late hours of a morning are, I am sure, injurious; and for a girl of twenty to have her breakfast always in bed is most unwholesome.

Bertha is full of life and spirit, and very pretty and attractive—a little chatterbox, who gives me

family histories by the hour if I will listen. The favourite theme is Aunt Rhoda, and how much more she cares for Aunt Nellie's children than for Uncle Francis', and how devoted she is to the Boddingtons, with endless gossip of the same type.

I have made a rule that both girls should read and work with me every morning for an hour or two, and I have been trying to arrange the books which will be most useful. Hitherto the amount of novels consumed has been fearful. Oliffe has no idea of it; but I am surprised that Rhoda, who is so cultivated and clever, should have made no effort to stem the tide.

Rhoda is, if I may so say, the great feature in the family, and I think I am afraid of her. She has a way of repressing people—snubbing, Geoffrey would call it—and there seems a want of tenderness about her. I hear a great deal of her devotion to her mother—perhaps they understand each other; but it is not my idea of what I should have been to mine, had I only known her. Rhoda is very clever, and I look at her often with an admiration she little guesses. Her eyes are beautiful, and when she is really touched they glow with a wonderful light; and there is a certain nobleness about her when in repose which is very striking. She is too abrupt and jerky in her movements generally, and stands so constantly on the defensive. I have not yet learned what are the forbidden subjects, and I seem unfortunate in always touching them. Yesterday, for instance, we were all sitting in the garden together, when I said, quite casually, to Rhoda:

"Your friends the Boddingtons called on me yesterday. How pleasant they are!"

"I am glad you think so," was the almost sharp response.

"Mr. Boddington writes a good deal in the reviews and leading magazines, does he not?" I asked.

"You had better ask him!" with still greater asperity.

"Of course he does, mamma," Bertha broke in; "and Mrs. Boddington composes music and is awfully clever. Aunt Rhoda always has learned friends."

"Like the barristers, do you mean, Bertha?" Rhoda said in her most repressed tone. "I wish you would keep your opinions to yourself."

"Yes, indeed," chimed in Sarah languidly; "and who cares to hear about the Boddingtons? I think them very stupid, and the children little prigs, bothering about flowers and what they call lovely things. I am sure they must often be a nuisance to Aunt Rhoda."

Rhoda's brow grew darker, and if Oliffe had not come upon the scene at that moment I do not know what would have followed. But my husband has so much tact, and always seems to say the right thing at the right moment. However, even with him to help us, we did not get into smooth water at once, for after a few indifferent remarks, he said:

"I see Mr. Murray is one of the assistant-masters at Bilbury School. A few years ago he was thought

to be a man of great promise, but he suddenly disappeared."

"Is that the David Murray Geoffrey talks about?" I asked.

"Yes, I think it is," Oliffe went on. "What a contrast those two are, types of young Oxford and old——"

"I cannot have Geoffrey undervalued," I said, smiling; "he is a great friend of mine."

"Who undervalued him?" Rhoda said almost fiercely. "Why should not the young be as good as the old? Oliffe implied nothing like disparagement."

I could only laugh. I was in jest, but Rhoda always seems so terribly in earnest.

Oliffe, anxious to turn the current of talk, went back to Mr. Murray:

"Mr. Murray is a powerful rival for any one, Alice, as you will say when you see him. He is sure to be looking up the Boddingtons in the course of the summer. I did hear that a cloud of some kind had passed over him, and that he had suffered from the fault of another, being wholly unworldly-wise and unpractical."

"Most uncommon failings in these money-making days," Rhoda said, "but I dare say not a word of the story about Mr. Murray is true."

"Look here, Rhoda," Oliffe said, "I want you to come and see my new ferns; they have been rearranged."

He drew my hand within his arm, and we adjourned to the conservatory, all except Sarah, who

was reading the third volume of a poor, ill-written novel; and Oliffe and I walked down to the side gate, through the shrubby path, with Rhoda on her way home.

"I don't get on any further with Rhoda; I am afraid of her," I said, when we parted.

"You will know her at last," Oliffe answered decidedly; "her depths are not sounded by everybody's plumb-line."

"Dear," I said, "I think I like more ripple on the surface. You know the Mediterranean at its deepest places can toss about little waves and look merry and pleasant."

"Ah, well!" my husband said, "time will show you what Rhoda really is. It is only a month to-day since we came home; and how are you getting on, darling? Tell me anything that I can do to help you. Alice, I trust you are happy."

"How can you doubt it?" I answered. He seemed satisfied as he looked into my face. "Yes, I am very happy; it is so sweet to have a home and to be encompassed with love."

My life at Castle Mervin was lonely, and for the last few years sad. My dear father's closing days were melancholy, clouded by the sin of one dear to us, my only brother. When at last the long career of shame and misery ended, my father failed rapidly. He never went into London, or took his seat in the House after the disgrace which he felt poor Gerald's life had been to an old and honoured name.

Perhaps those five weary years spent at Castle

Mervin, where the restless sea made perpetual moan at the foot of our rocky castle, where rides and walks with my poor father alone varied the monotony of the days as they came and went, make these bright times of life and activity and love more precious. So earnestly do I long to show my thanksgiving to God by true and loyal service to Him, and I hope I may in time see those two girls what I could wish. But I must be patient and not be too eager to bring about changes. I am sure it will be my fault if Bertha does not develop into a good bright woman, and she is really so good tempered and affectionate. She has little weak points which need tender strengthening, not vehement opposition. Last Sunday, for instance, she came down to breakfast in a very pink organdi muslin, not fit for a morning dress at all, and to my distress when we were ready for church I saw it surmounted by a hat with pale maize trimming and a feather to match.

"My dear Bertha, don't you think your black hat with the white feather would look better with that dress?"

"Oh! I don't know," Bertha said carelessly; "it is exactly like one of the Harrisons', and they get everything from London."

Here Sarah chimed in:

"Aunt Rhoda told you it was most dreadfully vulgar; you have such common taste."

Bertha's colour came, and vexation clouded her bright open face.

"Who cares for Aunt Rhoda!" she said, "a dowdy

who never puts on anything but black and grey things."

"Well," I said, "never mind to-day, dear. No hat is worth a contest."

There was some delay in starting, and Sarah got into the little pony-carriage, as she thinks she cannot walk so far as the Abbey Church, which is scarcely a quarter of a mile from our lower gates. Oliffe and I were walking together, when he said, "Where is Bertha?" We looked back, and saw Bertha advancing. The obnoxious hat was gone, and her face was all smiles and good temper under a pretty black one, with its long white feather.

I went to see Oliffe's mother this afternoon, and found her alone. Tudor Villa is a very comfortable, pretty house. It belongs to Oliffe, and his mother inhabits it rent free. Mrs. Heathcote was pleased to see me, and I felt more at ease with her than I have done before. She was delighted to find that I could knit, and could set her right in a pattern which was like that Cousin Mary was so often puzzled with. We talked a great deal of my husband and his early days; and nothing interests me more. Mrs. Heathcote told me how from the very first days of her widowhood she had leaned on Oliffe, and that all his family look to him for advice. I think from little hints she gave that she wishes me to invite Nellie and two or three of her children to Tulse Hill, and then Francis' wife and eldest girl. Francis, poor fellow, Mrs. Heathcote said, cannot leave his practice. He is terribly hard-worked, and an illness he had five years ago threw

him back, and he has an anxious, troubled life. "You will like Janet, I think," Mrs. Heathcote continued. "Rhoda and she don't always get on very smoothly, but then Rhoda is so very different to any one else. She has a very superior mind, and perhaps"—and here Mrs. Heathcote sighed—"she is a little intolerant of the weaknesses of other people, and yet no one can tell what depths of tenderness there are in Rhoda."

I am not sure that it is wholesome for any one to be so constantly held up as something extraordinary in her own family—to have, as it were, a sort of undisputed right to deliver judgment on every question, and to decide by her own code of laws what is right, or pretty, or pleasant, or the reverse. I hear on all sides that Rhoda is unlike every one, and superior to every one, and I know it must be true, but it does not as yet attract me. The very drawing-room where I was sitting with Mrs. Heathcote bore traces of Rhoda. It is full of adornments not at all after any recognised models. A branch of ivy was thrown round the looking-glass, and there were heaps of wild flowers, bluebells, late primroses, and anemones arranged in wide open plates. I had brought some flowers from the conservatory, and looked about in vain for one of the dainty china vases and baskets which are now so common. I did not find them there. I left my beautiful azaleas and ferns in Mona's hand as I went up, and asked her to put them in water. Mona always comes to speak to me and inquire for the master, as she calls Oliffe.

"What, are you walking, my lady?" she asks in her quaint Manx voice.

"Oh yes," I answered, "I am always independent of a carriage, and I don't like to keep the horses standing while I pay long visits. Will you tell me if that clock is right?" I said, pointing to the clock in the hall; "if it is, I shall have time to pay another call."

"It is not quite half-past four by the Abbey," Mona said; "we are always a little fast here."

I therefore found I could call at the Boddingtons', which I was strangely impelled to do.

Mrs. Boddington was at home, and I was shown in upon her and a gentleman with a light beard, sprinkled a little with grey, and a face it is not easy to describe. Mrs. Boddington introduced me to Mr. Murray, and he almost immediately left the room.

"Mr. Murray is come to us for Whitsun," Mrs. Boddington said. "He is at Bilbury School, a position not by any means worthy of him, as the masters there have always to begin at the lowest form, and rise by rotation."

The Boddingtons' drawing-room opens at the back on a pretty garden, and a tall figure was soon seen pacing up and down, his hands folded at his back, and his head bent forward.

"We are so glad to have him here, for his life has been a troubled one." And then we went on to other subjects, and I was rising to take leave when the door opened with a sharp, quick movement, and Rhoda appeared.

Her face expressed a good deal of surprise, and I don't think much pleasure, at seeing me.

"I have just met Oliffe," she said, in her abrupt manner; "he is gone to Tudor Villa expecting to find you there."

"I have been there," I said, "but on my way home I could not resist the temptation of coming to see Mrs. Boddington. This is a leisure day to me," I added, "for the girls are at the Harrisons', and Oliffe has been lunching with the magistrates."

"Pray don't apologise to me for your leisure afternoon," said Rhoda, in that particular voice which does so entirely repress me.

Mrs. Boddington now came to the rescue with a plan for to-morrow. Could I join them with Sarah and Bertie for a day at Culmemouth, the quaint old town or fishing village which stands at the mouth of the Culme, and has a ruined castle and curious irregular streets leading up from its small quay?

I said I should be most happy to come, and I was sure the girls would like it.

"Do you think, Alice," Rhoda interposed, "that Sarah is up to a day like that? She will only be a drag upon the more active."

"I will speak to her father about it," I said, "and if Mrs. Boddington will let me, I will send down a note with yes or no this evening. I will come in the carriage with the girls, and we can take some of your party with us. But I almost fear that Oliffe will be engaged in Kingsholme all to-morrow, so we must not count on him."

"Oliffe is not given to pic-nic excursions," Rhoda again, I thought very unnecessarily, said.

Mrs. Boddington turned a sweet bright smile upon her, saying:

"You seem determined we shall not enjoy our day, Rhoda. But we mean to try, in spite of you."

Who but Mrs. Boddington would have ventured on saying this? But, to my surprise, Rhoda laughed.

"You know I am not gregarious, Margaret. I like a day at Culmemouth well enough, with one or two people who can walk and climb."

"Well," Mrs. Boddington said, "I have invited Dora Thornbury also, so we shall not please you to-morrow. The one or two will be seven or eight. Our wagonette and Lady Alice's carriage will hold a really respectable party."

But the *gêne* was gone from Rhoda now, and she was all brightness, and looked really handsome, when one of the little Boddingtons came in, exclaiming:

"Rhoda, Rhoda, you are to come at once and see what father is showing Mr. Murray. It is the most splendid butterfly, with——"

"My dear Lily," her mother interposed, "do you not see Lady Alice Heathcote?"

Then the child replied to my greeting with the most perfect ease, still grasping Rhoda's hand, and finally dragging her from the room.

"Rhoda is very kind to my children," Mrs. Boddington said; "too kind I sometimes think."

As I was crossing the bridge on my way home, I heard the sound of horse's feet behind me, and

looking round, saw Oliffe. He dismounted in a moment, and was at my side, throwing the reins over Zoe's neck.

"My dear Alice," he began, "I am surprised to see you. You have not surely been walking into Kingsholme?"

"Yes, indeed, I have," I answered, laughing. "Why not?"

"It would have been better to have had the carriage, I think; at any rate, the pony-carriage."

"Sarah and Bertie have taken it to Thorpe End to-day. You know they are at the Harrisons."

"There are two bays standing idle," Oliffe persisted.

"But, dear, I enjoy a walk sometimes. I have been paying your mother a long visit."

"So she told me," he said; "and a very pleasant visit too."

"I am glad she liked it as much as I did," I answered. "Then I went to the Boddingtons, and there I had tea; so you see it would have kept the horses standing about, and the coachman and Thomas doing nothing. You don't mind my walking, Oliffe?" I asked, for I saw a subtle shadow on his face.

"Well, dearest," he said, "I think altogether I would rather you drove about the town, except perhaps, in the very early morning."

"Very well," I said. "Of course, if you wish it, I will drive. You will not mind my walking in the early morning to the service at the Abbey at eight o'clock? If I go through the plantation, I can

easily get there in a quarter of an hour and I should be at home by our nine o'clock breakfast. Perhaps you will sometimes come with me?" I urged.

Oliffe did not answer.

"May I go?" I asked.

"Don't ask me as if I were an autocrat, darling," he said, with his best smile, which always warms me like the sunshine. "I only feared the tax on your strength would be too great; however, we can but try."

"Thank you," I said as earnestly as I could; "you are so good to me."

Then I unfolded Mrs. Boddington's plan for the next day, and Oliffe told me he should be delighted to come, and would hold himself free from another engagement.

"I have property," he said, "not very far from Culmemouth: some mines, which are just now very productive. We have unexpectedly come upon a new vein of coal, and I must soon go there and look after the increase of hands which will be needed. I have a very good manager at the mines, but I like to be on the spot myself now and then."

"May I come with you," I asked, "for the miners belong to us? Have they a school, and is there a church and a reading-room?"

"There is a church not more than a mile off, and this is not an extensive mining district. I am the only proprietor. A small farm belonging to my late father-in-law very unexpectedly developed a vein of coal. The first shafts were sunk some years

ago, and it is only of late that we have determined to extend our operations."

This coal-mine seems to open out a field for usefulness for me. Surely the poor miners who work for us ought to be cared for, and the children taught.

No life seems so terrible to me as that passed underground; with sunshine and the sky overhead, the hardest labour seems endurable; but work in these dark black pits must be dreadful.

We do not all feel alike, of course; but I always picture the darkness that was felt as the greatest of all miseries. And how pleasant a thing it is for eyes to behold the sun!

Our excursion to Culmemouth was delightful. The drive along the river-side for two or three miles was charming, and then the road wound up the side of the high ground, which breaks off abruptly in what is known as the Lady's Tor, above Culmemouth. The town lies between it and another cliff, rising on one side almost perpendicularly from the sea, and beyond there is a large expanse of moorland, now blazing with gorse, and across which a road stretches like a white line, nearly straight, for seven or eight miles, to the town of Stonycroft, which is not far from the Sarah Mine.

We had luncheon at the little quaint inn of the Three Gulls in Culmemouth, and then those who could walk were anxious to explore the moor, see the Castle walls, and get as far as a great boulder called the Giant's Pillow, lying about half way be-

tween the fishing village—for it is little more—and Stonycroft.

Sarah could not walk well, and of course I stayed with her; and Dora Thornbury was also not vigorous enough to undertake an expedition entailing much fatigue. Oliffe was unwilling to leave me, and came back after the party had started to ask me if I were sure I wished to remain behind.

I had some longings, I confess, for the walk with him in the fresh free air blowing straight from the sea; but I only said:

“Our day is to come, when you take me to the mines, dearest. I had better stay with Sarah and Miss Thornbury.”

Part of my speech was unfortunately heard, for Miss Thornbury began to entreat me not to stay for her sake; and said she and Sarah would take care of each other. But Sarah's gloomy face was enough to tell me poor Miss Thornbury would have but a dull time of it if I deserted her; so I assured her I had quite made up my mind, and that we would go and sit on the beach, and get all the sea air we could without any fatigue.

The Culme loses itself in the sea with a noble sweep, and the village is built on either bank; and on the eastern shore there are many fishing-boats and small sloops, but there is no port for large vessels. The Culme is rapid and unnavigable for some miles; were it otherwise, the quiet abbey town of Kingsholme would be a city of trade, and Culme-mouth its busy port.

Now, as we crossed the curious old bridge to

the further side, we seemed to be amongst a people shut out from the world. We found a seat under the steep cliffs, and here I was much amused by listening to the talk of some fishermen's wives who were sorting the fish their husbands had taken the night before.

They were dark-eyed, brown women, with high white linen bonnets perched on their heads, and looking like caps of the Norman peasants. One beautiful young woman interested me very much. She was sitting a little apart from the workers, with her arms folded on her knees, and her face bent towards the rippling water.

"Just lookee at Cherry," said one of the women, who was pausing to take breath from her vigorous packing of one of the deep baskets. "She be a lady now, and can't put her hand to nought. I'd be 'shamed of such pride, I would!"

The dark eyes of the girl they called Cherry turned now from her contemplation of the sea to the speaker.

"I've worked enough in my time," she said. "You need not grudge me my home."

"Grudge it—no," said another pretty girl of an inferior type to Cherry. "I would not be a miner's wife for all the gold in the mines of Californy. Why, he may be blown up any day; and what's the good of life spent in a dark, dismal pit-hole, I'd like to know? Why, it's being a wife and no wife—that's what I call it!"

The large lustrous eyes, shaded by long curling lashes, were all alight now, and there was a curve

of scorn in the beautiful rosy mouth; but Cherry did not speak.

"No doubt you get plenty of clothes and good food, and can be as lazy as you like; but when I was about it I would have had something a bit younger and smarter than old Nat Penrose, with his black face and cant!"

And now Cherry drew herself erect, and, springing to her feet, said, with her strong but sweet west-country accent:

"You be quiet, Nell Tregarth, and don't speak like that of your betters. Who are you to dare to talk of him I call husband like that?"

"There, there, don't fly out into one of thy rages, Cherry, my girl; we all know thee of old. Thou art welcome to thy old man for all I care."

Cherry stood for another moment, irresolute, and then, sinking down in her old place, bowed her head low, and was silent.

By degrees the group of women dispersed, bearing their baskets with them, and still Cherry sat in the same attitude.

Sarah had brought one of her novels with her, and Miss Thornbury was engrossed with a little book in which she believed she was making sketches.

I walked up and down before the sea on a little strip of sand, and looked at Cherry from time to time with an ever-increasing interest. So a quarter of an hour passed, and I was lulled by the murmur of the sea at my feet into a sort of dreamy reverie, when I was roused by voices calling me:

"Mamma!—Lady Alice!—oh, mamma!"

I started and turned, and saw, to my horror, that the little strip of sand was cut off from the beach where Sarah and Miss Thornbury sat, by a deep strong current. The sea had crept round my belt of sand, up and down which I had paced musing, and I saw at once I was in danger of immersion, if of nothing more serious.

Sarah's cries attracted the girl they had called Cherry. She came running down the beach like a swift young deer from her position a little nearer the town than that of the two girls, and twisting up her skirts with a skilful quick hand, she took off her boots and stockings and came through the ever-deepening stream with prompt firm steps. Even Cherry, I saw, strong and lithe as her frame was, staggered a little, and the waters were eddying up to her knees.

"There is no time to lose, madam," she said as she reached me; "I must carry you;" and suiting the action to the word, she took me in her stout vigorous arms and waded back with me to *terra firma*. Not without difficulty; I felt her stagger again and again, and I heard her deep breaths, which were almost gasps at last. Once I thought she would fall with me, and then the strong, resistless sea would carry us on its breast, and I should never see Oliffe's face again. All passed before me as in a vision, and the two minutes' struggle with the water seemed hours. At last I felt I was on solid ground, and Cherry and I sank together on the sand out of the reach of the advancing tide.

"Five minutes more and I could not have done it," she said, as Sarah and Miss Thornbury bent over me and asked if I were hurt. Then, looking back, I saw the sand where I had been standing had wholly disappeared, and the little rippling waves had swelled into size and motion.

"I am thankful to God I saved you, miss," Cherry said, "and Nat will be thankful too."

She was quietly wringing the sea water from the lower edge of her crimson serge skirt, and then sitting down, she drew her stout grey stockings over her pretty white feet.

"How can I thank you," I said, "for saving me! I must take you to my husband, that he may thank you. You must come to the Three Gulls and wait there for him."

"Oh! so you have got a husband," Cherry said, "I am glad of that. I'd like to see him."

"Mamma," Sarah now broke in, "this girl can't know who you are. She talks to you just as she would to those old fish-women."

I only smiled, but rather faintly. Truth to tell, I was somewhat shaken and tired, and very glad to go back to the Three Gulls leaning on Cherry's strong arm.

Miss Thornbury was also much excited by what had passed, and ran on to order a fire in the sitting-room at the little inn, that I might dry my feet, which were very wet. When I had had a rest on the little horsehair sofa I felt better, and I was glad to drink the tea which the kind landlady made for me.

The little adventure was soon known, and I saw dark curious eyes looking in through the little open casement, and heard Cherry Penrose's name again and again. Sarah found the small, low room stuffy and close, and I begged her and Miss Thornbury to go and sit by the sea again, and leave me alone. Cherry had left me too, and I was just closing my eyes when she returned.

"I only went to lace up my boots a bit, and make myself tidy; and now I must bid you good-bye," she added.

But I held out my hand.

"No," I said; "sit down and tell me about yourself and your husband. I heard the women talking to you on the beach, you know, and I was sorry for you when the little girl with the lilac bonnet teased you."

"Was you?" she asked, her lovely eyes seeking mine.

"Yes," I said, "for I love my husband dearly, and I know him to be great and good, so I knew how I should have felt had I been in your place."

"Ah, you see," Cherry said, "I am different to you. I lived with grandmother down here in Culmemouth, and I was wildish and fond of my own way; and then Nat—he is foreman at the Sarah Mines—he used to come in and see his mother, who was one of this place too, and he loved me and asked me to marry him, and I said No, over and over again. I did not like to think of marrying a miner, and then he seemed old for me, and he is terribly good, is Nat. He would

“speak to me as no one else did, and I used to laugh. Ah!” she said, clasping her hands, “I did not know aught about him till grand-mother died, and I was left alone, and people was hard and unkind to me. But still, when Nat came and said, ‘Let me give you a home,’ I was so proud and high I wouldn’t. I didn’t want him to think I only married him for a home. So I worked and worked, and drudged at the sorting of the fish, till one day there came a man with the news that the water had come in in the mine, and the foreman, Nat Penrose, and two other men was down the shaft, and they were dead by that time. I set off like a mad thing across the moor, past the Giant’s Pillow, and I never stopped all the nine miles till I got to the pit’s mouth. All my heart said was, ‘Nat, Nat, I love you, I love you,’ and with a great cry I fell down in a faint as I saw two men bearing out of the shaft a man’s body. I thought it was Nat; but when I came to myself he was bending over me, and calling me by name, ‘Cherry, *my* Cherry.’ Yes, I was his Cherry from that time, and never a hard word have I had from him. I had a baby two months ago, and it lived just a month, and then died. I fretted dreadful for it, and my Nat sent me down here to his mother’s to see if the change would set me up; but I can’t live away from him, and he is coming to fetch me back this evening.

“That’s my tale,” Cherry said. “Now, my lady, please excuse my boldness. I hear you are Squire Heathcote’s lady, the great gentleman who owns the

Sarah. I never thought you were anybody so grand, so you must please excuse my being so bold."

A good deal more passed between us, and Cherry Penrose and I are fast friends.

Oliffe, on his return from the walk, was told the story of Cherry's heroic conduct, and said Penrose was the most valuable workman at the mines.

We are to pay our visit there before the summer closes, and Oliffe promises that we shall stay a night or two. I should so like to see for myself the working of the mine, and the ways of life of those employed there.

We saw that to offer Cherry Penrose money would hurt her feelings, and even offend her high spirit. But I have sent her a pretty suit of blue serge, trimmed with crimson braid, in which I am sure she will charm her Nat's eyes, and a Bible and Church-service with good print, in which I have written her name and the date of my day at Culmemouth. We had a very pleasant drive homewards, and I have never seen Rhoda so bright and charming. Mr. Murray seems to avoid me. Perhaps he is very shy: many great scholars are. He has a most interesting face, and I hope I shall get to know him better some day.

It is some days since I wrote here, and now I am in the thick of returning visits, and accepting invitations to dance, and to dine, and to play croquet. This morning there were four or five notes, and I was greatly amused, though sorry too, at the remarks they called forth.

Unhappily I began the discussion by asking at breakfast, as I opened an envelope with a very large gold and violet crest and cypher, who the Payne Smiths were? I did not recall the name.

"Mr. and Mrs. Payne Smith," I read, laughing, "request the honour of the Lady Alice Heathcote and Mr. Heathcote's company at dinner on Thursday, June 20th, at seven o'clock."

"Who are they," I said, "who so impertinently put me in my wrong place?"

"Oh, dreadful people, mamma!" Bertha exclaimed. "You must not go there. They were quite poor people only a few years ago, and Mrs. Smith has no 'h's,' and dresses in the most frightful style."

"Bertha," my husband said, in his sternest voice, "let me hear no more of that gossip. You are not to dictate to your mother as to what invitations she accepts or declines."

Sarah, who had dragged herself down for the second time to breakfast since I came home, now said, in her slow, drawling tones:

"But, papa, for once Bertha is right. Imagine sending an invitation like that to a civilised house!"

"Never mind," I said hastily, turning to some more letters. "Here is a dance at Thorpe End on the 23rd: you will like that, Bertie. And here is a letter from Hilda Wynne, telling me I may expect to see her and Geoffrey on Monday; and I suppose your aunt Janet and your cousin Agnes will be here."

"That is no great pleasure, mamma. Aunt Janet is always so grumbling, and Agnes is jealous because we happen to be better off than they are."

"And there will be Aunt Nellie and two of those children at Grannie's."

"What a treat for us! Agnes is not very agreeable, but she is better than those spoiled little Reynolds'."

"I daresay I shall like the spoiled children," I said, vexed at this habit, which seems so inveterate, of depreciating every one, or rather saying, with no really evil intention, but carelessly, what would leave a sting behind, were I to pay much heed to the girl's remarks.

"Oh, I daresay you will like them," Sarah said; "and think them and Aunt Nellie and Aunt Janet perfect. Aunt Rhoda says you like every one."

Oliffe had left the room to see some one in his study, and I then, as quietly but as decidedly as I could, told Sarah and Bertha that I did not wish to hear what any one said of me: that I would rather find out what people were for myself: and that, now so many of their father's relations were coming to Kingsholme, I did beg them to be careful of what they said.

Sarah pouted, and looked very cross and then began to complain of a pain in her back, and went up to my morning-room to lie down.

Bertha, however, lingered, and was quite good-tempered and pleasant.

"Then you think we ought never to talk of people, mamma? But every one does. We are not worse than the rest of the world. You should hear what Liza Harrison said yesterday about Aunt Rhoda and the Boddingtons."

"I don't want to hear; and, dear Bertha, do, please, spare me such gossip. Talk to me of yourself as much as you like, of books, and anything that interests you, and let me help you in anything; but do spare me all these sharp, and often, I dare say, false opinions of other people."

"I am not false, mamma; I always speak the truth."

"Silence is golden, Bertha, remember that. Now come and help me to gather the flowers for the hospital to-day, and then, when I have visited Mrs. Hall, we will have a nice quiet two hours' reading before luncheon."

"Oh, I shall like that," Bertha said, springing with alacrity to get my hat and her own, and then, armed with the large scissors, we went to fill the basket, which I hope always to send to the hospital twice a week.

RHODA'S STORY.

“Day of days! unmarked it rose,
In whose hours we were to meet,
And forgotten passed. Who knows,
Was earth cold, or sunny sweet,
At the coming of your feet?

“And we met; you knew not me,
Mistress of your joys and fears,
Held my hand, that held the key
Of the treasure of your years,
Or the fountain of your tears.

“For you knew not it was I,
And I knew not it was you,
We have learnt, as days went by.
But a flower struck root and grew
Underground, and no one knew.”

A. C. THOMPSON.

RICHARD'S STORY

"Day of great sorrow to it was
When I first saw you, dear to me
And a heart full of love and joy
That I could not keep to myself
But I told you of my love and joy
And you said, 'I love you too'"

"And we were married, dear to me
And I told you of my love and joy
And you said, 'I love you too'"

"I love you, dear to me
And I told you of my love and joy
And you said, 'I love you too'"

A. C. Thompson

RHODA.

TUDOR VILLA,
June, 1870.

SOME days stand out with a sharp distinct outline in the level of lives, like mine: just as a mountain peak, which catches the sunlight, stands out above the surrounding, dull, grey sameness of a fading autumn landscape, catching and reflecting the sun's smile, which the lower places miss.

The day at Culmemouth was one of these, full of freshness and brightness, which will be just the same whether I look back on it from the distance of a week, as now—or of years, as hereafter.

Let me confess that I had been very full of bristles and angles for some time previously. I am not given to introspection, not believing the practice wholesome for me, whatever it may be for others.

Life is complex and difficult enough, without making it ten times more so by self-torture. For our motives lie in such tangled heaps, and there are so many twists and turns to mislead and betray that the most conscientious who try to reduce the whole to order must often fail. It is, for me at least, a vain effort to attempt to docket motives in bundles—there unselfishness, here love of praise; there love

of display, here jealousy; there, disinterested desire for the good of others. So many and so subtle are the gossamer threads which are woven in the web and woof of inner life, that a morbid distaste with all the world in general, and with myself in particular, would be the result to me of too careful analysis, and I should be disabled from pushing on, as best I can, in the straight road lying before me.

I think the entirely new state of affairs in the family has, to use a common expression, tried me. I hear on all sides how charming Alice is; I see her, with no effort, winning all hearts. I see Oliffe, our king and master, yielding to her hand. Yes, Alice is one of those, to me, doubtfully attractive characters—a popular person!

I think her sweetness of temper has been an offence to me, for again and again I have caught myself answering with scant courtesy, and the afternoon before the happy Culmemouth day, I was so nearly rude to her, that even Margaret took me to task. I did feel ashamed of myself, and when Dora Thornbury came in, soon after Alice was gone, and accepted Margaret's proposal about the picnic with rapture, I was ready to join in the chorus, and say I thought it was a delightful plan.

The children had taken me into the garden to see a butterfly Charlie had captured, and Mr. Murray was descanting on Australian insects—the curious light that the similarity of insects throws on the geographical condition of different parts of the world; and from thence a great deal of interesting discussion followed between Mr. Murray and Charlie.

Then I went home, and Mr. Murray and Dora and Charlie Boddington came with us.

We walked slowly in the delicious May evening, and Mr. Murray and I were left to each other for a pleasant quarter of an hour. Some one has said, that when we come to a new friend in life's journey, it is simply a recognition from the first, and is different from an acquaintance. I feel this with Mr. Murray. I may try to reason with myself that I have only seen him three or four times, that he bends to my level; that he is not sparkling and bright, like Charlie Boddington, nor sententious and grave, like Dr. Martyn, for whom, for many years, I have had a profound liking and admiration: But Mr. Murray awakes in me a great longing to be and do more than I have ever felt before; I a woman of seven-and-thirty feel a kindling of the flame of enthusiasm, such as has not warmed me for many a day, perhaps never before.

"Rhoda," mother said when I went down to tea, "I have had such a nice visit from Alice; she is so kind and pleasant, and how she loves our dear Oliffe! I have been telling her everything I could think of—of his early years. I think he is most fortunate, and we are fortunate too."

"Yes," I replied, "Alice makes friends everywhere. I scarcely like to leave you for a whole day, mother, but the Boddingtons have planned an excursion to-morrow to Culmemouth, and have asked me to go with them."

"How very pleasant for you," was mother's an-

swer; "I hope the fine weather will last, and that you will enjoy it."

"But what will you do with yourself, mother? I must make a little plan for you before I go."

"It is made already," mother answered. "Kind Miss Sambourne came this afternoon, just after Alice left me, and offered to take me a drive tomorrow, and you too," she added, with a smile; "but I only accepted for myself."

"That was fortunate," I said; "you know I should have gone to sleep, or made myself disagreeable."

"Yes, dear, I know that," mother said, with another smile; "but I have asked Miss Sambourne to come back to tea; so, unless you are very late in returning from Culmemouth, you will find her here. I am sorry, as I know poor Betsy Sambourne is one of your pet aversions."

"Don't give me such a bad character, mother. I ought to have no aversions. I feel so amiable tonight that I could almost kiss poor Betsy. And then I am so grateful to her for looking after the dear mother I desert."

"Yes, I see," mother said, "she is fond of gossip, poor thing! and I cannot think where she gets it all from. She was full to-day of some stories which are afloat about Alice's brother. Now the poor man is dead, it seems a pity to ferret out all his misdeeds; and especially to relate them to me."

"Of course; it is horribly bad taste," I said. "Betsy must be repressed at once, if she attempts it again."

"Yes," mother continued, "I felt sure you would say so. Miss Sambourne has a story of Lord Kinloch going about under a feigned name, and by his plausible manner deceiving people so much that he got them into his power. Miss Sambourne says she heard, from a cousin of the Mitchells', that a most honourable man became surety for him for a large amount; and that he ruined him, so that he really left England for some years in consequence. And they say he was married twice, making one poor girl believe he was a widower, while his wife was living. He was only saved from the consequences of his wickedness by his death; or he would have been prosecuted and punished as he deserved. A sad story indeed, and I could almost wonder that dear Alice looks so happy. I cannot fancy you, for instance, taking the disgrace of such a brother so calmly. But, thank God," mother added, "we have been spared that bitter sorrow; I am proud of my sons, and you may be proud of your brothers. If poor Francis has failed in life, it has not been from any want of energy and industry——"

"No, indeed," I said earnestly. "Francis is a dear old fellow, though he has been borne down by the strong current of many children and small means. The only thing I think a mistake is, that his elder girls are not taught to work and help their father and mother."

"They are not clever enough for governesses," mother urged.

"Oh! I don't mean governess-work; but any-

thing—sewing, drawing, anything—anything but idleness.”

“Ah, Rhoda!” mother said again. Every one is not so full of vigour as you are.”

So the evening passed; and after tea I read aloud to mother, as I always do when we are together. She likes a good story, and so do I. We are just finishing Kingsley's “Westward Ho!” which is to the mind like a rush of freshening wind across the Atlantic is to the body. Who could be morbid or dull, or in a mental fog, when reading those tales of enterprise, and the deeds of the grand old men of Devon; and the key-note of the whole—reality?

We were off at nine o'clock the next morning. It was a day to be thankful for: so perfect throughout. I think I am like an aneroid, so much does my mental temperature rise and fall with the weather. As we neared the sea, the breeze was deliciously fresh and cool, and there was a subtle fragrance from the gorse on the high moor.

We had luncheon at the Three Gulls, a little inn, with a garden in front, and covered with roses and clematis and honeysuckle.

The room was low-roofed and stuffy, and I panted to get out again; and thought there was an unnecessary array of good things brought out of the Tulse Hill hampers. But Oliffe must always do everything *en prince*.

The Boddingtons and Mr. Murray are water-drinkers, and the excellence of the champagne and chablis were lost on them. I drink claret, as mother

does not like to see me take water only, because Oliffe disapproves it, and Francis, as a doctor, gives his opinion against it. They talk about the brain tissue being dependent for nourishment on a proper amount of stimulants. I don't know how far that is true; anyhow, the best brain tissues I know are those which depend solely on the primitive form of nourishment.

After luncheon there was a good deal of provoking discussion as to who should go to explore the old Castle, and admire the view from the Giant's Pillow; and who should stay behind. I don't think Alice was at all obliging to stay upon the beach with Sarah and Dora Thornbury. Dora always shirks too long a walk, which may increase the colour on her cheeks to an unbecoming point; and Sarah is really quite unable to undertake a steep climb like that up the hill, under which the Castle stands, to the moor.

The children's impatience became great at the delay; and to allay it, I started with them towards the Castle. The ruined keep and moss-grown, seaworn battlements are soon explored. I was telling Lily and May about the brave old Saxon who is said to have held this Castle against the Danes for many months, when I found Mr. Murray had joined us.

"Go on, Rhoda," Lily said, "and finish the tale. I like to think of the brave Edgar holding out."

"Ah!" Mr. Murray said, "and do you know why he gave in at last? for the Danes took the Castle

and pushed up the country far beyond Kingsholme, and were masters of the entire district."

"No, we don't know," Lily said. "I dare say father does. But do tell us?"

"Father knows everything!" May added; "but do tell us!"

And as we walked on, gaining at last the wide heathery plain above, Mr. Murray told of Lady Emma, Edgar's wife, who, seeing the case hopeless and the lives of the few remaining Saxons in daily increasing peril, prayed her lord and husband to make a treaty with the conquerors. "Never till I die!" was Edgar's answer, though he could barely lift his crossbow, and his cheeks were thin and wan. Then the Lady Emma let her golden hair fall over her shoulders like a veil, and dressing herself in all her fairest garments, she kissed her children and her husband, saying, "Farewell; a long farewell." Edgar asked her where she was going, and why she deserted him? "I go," she said, "to the proud Dane, to pray him for thy life, and the lives of my children; and when he grants my prayer, I will betake myself to yonder hill-top and watch the end. Stay here I cannot! to see thee and my children and our faithful liegemen die the slow death of famine." Then Edgar swore that she should not go; that if she put herself in the power of the fierce Northmen, her life and her honour were at stake; but Emma heeded him not. And as the dawn was breaking the next morning, she left the Castle, and wended her way through the ranks of the besiegers, none daring to stop her

progress, none daring to question or insult the golden-haired lady who thus tacitly trusted them to do her no harm. The fierce Dane Sigrid was up and stirring when Emma reached his tent. He had work to do that day from which the stoutest of his followers might shrink. "If they hold out a day longer, I will fire the Castle walls, and not one of all that are left shall live to tell the tale!" He had just sworn this to his chiefs, when, passing in between them, with slow and stately step, came the Lady Emma, Edgar's wife, her golden hair falling over her shoulders all alight with the eastern sunbeams, which were striking the moor-land and the Castle walls with glory. Then Sigrid said: "Who comes here?" and Emma bowed with womanly grace, and answered: "The wife of my lord Edgar, whose town and Castle thou hast besieged for seven long months. I come to offer the admittance and possession if thou art still determined to rob and oppress those who never harmed thee or thine. Swear that my five children and their father, and all such as can stand or crawl a foot's space from the dire famine which is fast consuming them, shall have free passage from the place, and I will give thee the key of the large outer gate, and thou mayest enter in and take thy spoil. It seems to me that it is a poor and mean warfare which is waged against women and children, and men whose brave hearts are the only strong things left to them, in weak, frail bodies perishing for lack of food."

Lily and May listened with the keenest interest to Mr. Murray's tale; and as he paused to look back

over the Castle and little fishing town nestling below in the summer sunshine, while the sea lay like a wide sapphire plain, darkened into deeper violet shades here and there as the small white clouds cast their shadows over it, Lily slipped her hand into his.

"Tell us the end?" she said.

"The end!" Mr. Murray repeated. "Lady Emma won her victory. Sigrid treated her, as all the rest did, with loyal deference; for, you know, she wore good armour—which no woman ever wears entirely in vain—for she was wrapt about by innocence, purity, and courage. It is said Sigrid contented himself with leaving a small band of Danes in the Castle and village; and that these were true to the oath they swore, and which they called "Our Lady's Vow." Not an arm was lifted against the wan and wasted sufferers, who turned on them big hungry eyes and lay down, some of them at least, to die, now the need of exertion was over. Lady Emma went, as she had said she would, up to that high point yonder, to watch the end; and there in the evening they found her, with the setting sun colouring her hair and robe with rosy light, and her fair, pale face turned upwards to God. They bore her to her husband, and laid her in her bed, in the eastern side of the Castle; and there, when the sun rose the next morning——"

"Oh! don't say she died!" the children said eagerly. "Don't say she died!"

"Well," Mr. Murray answered, with a smile, as he looked down into Lily's sweet face; "well, I

won't say it; but, little lady, what difference does it make now whether Lady Emma died then or not? How many thousands have died in all these hundreds of years since her time!"

"Ah! but," May said, interrupting him, "I like to think she lived to do more good to her little children, you know."

"Think it then, by all means," was the answer; "it is a very good thought. All stories, you know, have morals; and so has mine."

"Oh! but I don't care for morals," Lily said; and, springing away, the two little girls ran off through the winding grassy paths between the gorse-bushes, with movements as airy as those of the little blue moths and white and yellow butterflies, which were having a grand time of it in the May sunshine.

"Ah! none of us are fond of morals," Mr. Murray said half to himself and half to me.

"Don't make sweeping assertions," I said. "Tell me your moral in this case, and make me an exception to your rule."

"Well, if you wish it. It lies in a narrow compass, and is simply this: that when the good of others hangs in the balance, it is nobler to give up even a brave resolve, than bring upon helpless and innocent people a penalty they don't deserve. Women," he went on, "have that instinctive sense of right and wrong which helps them to decide at once; while men will obstinately go on, regardless of all that is involved in their persistence, and

unable, in short, to see any side of the picture but their own."

"Yes," I said, "I know women do get the credit for this *savoir vivre*, or tact, or whatever you choose to call it. But there are many exceptions, for Lady Emmas are not too common."

"I dare say you are right," he said, with a sigh; "but the Sigrids are common enough, I will answer for it."

"Resolution is a fine quality, I know," I answered, "I hate shuffling, irresolute people, who, even if they are good, miss leaving any mark upon the world, because they are always changeable and undecided, and waste time about trifles. Think how many words were wasted just now, because no one could say who should come and who should stay behind."

Mr. Murray laughed; he has such a pleasant low laugh.

"Ah," he said, "you are, I fear, terribly strong-minded."

I remembered the echo of the words in the hall at the Boddington's, on the night when I first saw Mr. Murray, and I said, in that sharp way of mine:

"If I hate anything it is to be called strong-minded."

"Indeed! more than being called irresolute and undecided."

"Don't catch me up in what I say like that, please," I remonstrated. "Now shall we wait till the others overtake us," I said, looking back at the

party behind, whose figures were just appearing at the edge of the moor-land.

"No, I don't intend to wait for them. I resolved to push on to that big boulder, or Tor, there, with you, and I don't mean to change my plan—winning your favour thereby, let me hope. What a pretty, bright creature your younger niece is," Mr. Murray continued; "and Miss Thornbury is or has been a beauty, I should say. The past tense, however, hardly applies. She looks young still, though not in *la première jeunesse*."

"I should think not," I replied. "She is my age—older rather than younger. You would never imagine it I dare say."

"No, she looks younger, certainly; but till I studied your photograph in Boddington's book last night, I did not know what you were like. Miss Thornbury I can see at once—fair, blue-eyed, clear-skinned, graceful, and with a great deal of light hair, while—"

"Go on," I said, "and finish your—"

"No, I will not go on," was the answer. "We will talk of something else."

And we did talk of something else—of the great world springing into vigorous being, in the southern hemisphere. I say we talked; but rather I listened while my companion spoke of the interest he felt in the awakening dawning power of Melbourne and Adelaide—a hundred years ago a wild desolation—now art, science, and literature kindling into life.

Then he looked back to the days of the half-legendary Edgar and Emma, and traced the slow

but certain advance of the footsteps of civilisation; and again looking onward to the time when, at a far quicker speed, the vast continent of Australia and the New Zealand Islands should reach our present standpoint; then of the great law of progress, and the growth in goodness and truth, in which every one of us has a share—a part to take or leave unheeded, as members of one great brotherhood.

Mr. Murray lay outstretched at the base of the Giant's Pillow, when we reached it, and I sat on a fragment of limestone, which the children called a perfect chair, with back and arms complete. How happy the children were climbing about, finding treasures of lichen and moss, and little starry-white flowers which grew in patches in the soft carpet spread around.

How the larks sang—overhead, and how faint and low was the distant murmur of the sea, washing the base of the high cliffs whose summit we had reached.

"They will never find us here, Rhoda," Lily said. "May we run back and meet them? They may go quite round the outside of the Giant's Pillow, and never find our dear, beautiful corner in it."

"Yes," I said, "run back if you like, but don't break your legs by climbing over the rock."

I don't know how long we had been silent after the children went, when Mr. Murray said, suddenly sitting upright:

"I have been talking a great deal to you, just as if I had known you since the time of Sigrid the

Dane; but I think I ought to say when I speak of progress, and the certain evolution of good out of evil, that I recognise only one Hand which is sufficient for this. I believe faith in Christ to be the great panacea—the power of God's Word the giant lever which can remove mountains of ignorance and sin, and God's Spirit as the enlightener of dark souls. I don't like to see a man like our friend Boddington giving up outward observances. I grant that too often people go with a crowd to church from every motive but the right one; and, oh! I grant," he said, with increased energy, "that the sermons are often but milk and water ten times diluted, but there is the act of worship to God, and there is the prayer prayed, as thousands have prayed before. You see a great deal of Boddington, I suppose?"

"Oh yes," I replied; "he and his wife are my only really close friends, and there is a distant family connection between us."

"He is a fine fellow," Mr. Murray said; "and I know no position more enviable than that of a man who has enough means to enable him to take work easily."

"Charlie does work with a will," I said, rising on the defensive.

"Yes, I know it; but still there is no carking, miserable pounds, shillings, and pence cares in the background. Grant that men less true and earnest than Charlie would spend their lives in a desultory fashion, flitting about from point to point in the fields of literature as they pleased, still Boddington

is happily placed. What a charming wife! and those children are——”

And here Willy, who never deserted his mother, came running into our retreat, triumphantly shouting to his sisters:

“I have found them! I have found them!”

The three gentlemen walked on towards Stonycroft, but Bertha, Margaret, and I with the children enjoyed our seats for half an hour longer, and then turned back to the Castle. Alice had met with an adventure, and been surrounded by the tide. I think there was rather an unnecessary fuss raised about it, and Oliffe made the dark-eyed girl a speech, which brought a reply with blunt honesty.

“Ay, it was just nothing. I’ve been in deeper water many a time with a shrimping-net, when I was a girl, though I don’t say but that the tide did run pretty strongish.”

Mr. Murray walked home with me from the Boddingtons’ house, and lingered at the door.

“Will you come in and see mother?” I asked; and he did not hesitate a moment. We found Miss Sambourne and mother sitting together in the gloaming, and I caught Miss Sambourne’s high-pitched voice saying:

“Yes; Lady Alice’s brother was a dreadful——”

“At that gossip again,” I said, not audibly; while poor mother exclaimed:

“Rhoda! I am so glad!” and I advanced, introducing Mr. Murray as I did so. Mother rose with her own pretty courtesy to greet him; and Mr. Murray, after acknowledging Miss Sambourne with a

stiff bow, devoted himself to mother, telling her of our day's excursion, and entering into her reminiscences of Culmemouth in former times.

When at last Mr. Murray rose to say good-night, I knew he had won her heart; but how disagreeable it was to hear Miss Sambourne's criticism, and wonders, and exclamations.

I would not be cross, however, as a child after a day's pleasure often is, and bore everything with equanimity, so much so, that when Miss Sambourne was gone, mother said I really had refrained from snubbing her, under great provocation.

Yes, I should say it was great provocation. Why will kind-hearted single women make themselves so ridiculous? I believe Miss Sambourne would do anything for mother, and for me too, if I would let her, and the only way with such people is to put their virtues in one scale and their failings in another, and try to make them balance.

I never indulged in this sort of moralising before, never having been given to the epistolatory mania which attacks most women in early life. Thus, I suppose, this journal-keeping of mine, to which Oliffe's marriage and my birthday together gave birth, has a charm for me, which it would not have for others who tell their dearest friends everything about their frames and feelings. But let me confess, that as I see my thoughts in writing before me, they gather strength, and for a person who, like me, is hard in judgment of others, this is useful. I feel ashamed as I look over what I have

said even of poor Betsy Sambourne, how much more so of my strictures on Alice.

Alice comes down to the eight o'clock service at the Abbey. I am always up early in summer, but I never think of going to church. However, on Whitsun Monday I heard the Abbey bell, just as I have heard it at eight o'clock all my life, and I thought I would go to the service.

The sun was shining straight in at the east window of the choir—which, though small, is a beautiful specimen of Early English. There were but half-a-dozen people gathered together, but two of the kneeling figures were familiar to me—my sister-in-law Alice and Mr. Murray. There is nothing very elevating in plain, quiet reading of prayers and psalms and lessons in a very ordinary voice by one of the priest-vicars, but I felt strangely impressed with the silence that followed, when the small congregation remained kneeling long after the retreating footsteps of the clergyman were heard hastening down the nave to his breakfast.

The good Quakers speak of that covering of silence which descends upon their meetings, wrapping them round with a gentle mysterious power. I think I understood it this morning.

I could not move till others did, and then I walked slowly down the nave. A poor, infirm old woman stumbled over the mat by the big west door, and fell. She was neither very clean nor very lovely in appearance; but before I had time to consider whether I should help her up or not, a step behind me quickened its pace, and Mr. Murray bent

over the poor old thing, asking her as tenderly as if she had been a princess if she were hurt.

Groans and moans were the only reply, and then the strong arms raised her, and placed her on a bench with gentle care. Alice had now joined us, and asked if the old woman were hurt.

"I think her arm is broken," Mr. Murray said. "We must take her home, and send for a doctor to set it. Look," he said, "how helplessly her arm hangs."

"She is here every day," Alice said, "but I don't know where she lives: perhaps the verger can tell us."

"Come, rouse up!" said that important person, who was now bearing down upon us with his big bunch of keys, ready to lock the great west door behind us—which he was most anxious to do. "Come, rouse up, Mrs. Butt, and don't give the gentry all this trouble."

But Mrs. Butt only groaned. I confess I think she might have spoken if she had tried, but, however that may be, we could get no answer; and the verger proceeded to tell us that Mrs. Butt lived in St. Martin's Lane, not far off, and he would go there and send her little grandchild to help her home.

Mr. Murray said, however, he would see the poor helpless creature to her house, and turning quickly to me, asked:

"Can you go for a doctor? it is always better to get a broken bone set at once."

I felt wooden and awkward as I stood by Alice

and Mr. Murray, who both seemed so well up to the requirements of the moment.

I went across the Abbey Square, as I was told, to Mr. Barnes' house, and heard the reply to the message:

"Only an old woman who has broken her arm! Oh, she can wait."

How different, thought I, to the tender manly tones I had just heard over the poor old creature—by no means an attractive object, and yet treated with respect and kindness, and raised as gently by Mr. Murray as if she had been a young and beautiful woman of high degree. I need not, however, write any more details of this—how old Mrs. Butt was taken home, how the little grandchild was cheered by kind words, and money given her to get some food for her granny; how for the first time—to my shame be it spoken—I stood in a cottage, while the tardy doctor set the arm, and helped him by holding the bandages and splint. Alice could not stay—I knew well why. To be late for Oliffe's breakfast would have been a grave offence. At last it was all over, and Mr. Murray and I walked away together.

"You will look after the poor old woman," he said; "and if she wants a nurse, I dare say you will manage it. That little girl, however, seems up to the mark, and is very handy. How grand all this looks to-day," he went on, pausing at the iron gate leading from the Abbey Square, and looking back at the great west front standing in the soft haze of the brilliant summer morning. "After living

in a country where nothing is old, it is pleasant to have one's bump of veneration developed again. Nothing old," he repeated, "and no memories of battles, and conflicts, and struggles. England is the best place, after all."

We came to the turn to Tudor Villa, and there we parted.

"I am off to Bilbury again to-day," he said. "Strictly speaking, I had no right to this holiday, but I rather chafe against the collar; the big dunces and the little dunces stick so fast at the *Pons Asinorum*. You got over that when you were six years old, I should think," he said. "Well, don't forget my old woman—and good-bye."

I was very late for our late breakfast, and vexed to see mother patiently waiting, with the cosy over the tea-pot, and never uttering a word of reproach.

"I have been to church," I said, kissing her, "and an old woman fell down and broke her arm. I had to get a doctor, and wait till it was set."

"How kind of you, dear. I am sure you must want your breakfast. Look, there are your letters, and some proofs of that little story, I think."

But I let the proofs lie unheeded. I thought then as often since that I have missed the key-note which sets life into a grand harmony. However disagreeable I will look after Mrs. Butt, and I think I will go to church every morning."

But here is the great tide of relations coming in soon, and there is an alarming amount of croquet parties and dinner parties. People who had not thought of me for years now write and beg me to

give them the pleasure of my company to meet my brother and Lady Alice. Thus her light is shining on me in my obscurity, and I am coming forth into notice.

June 10.—Nellie and the children have arrived; Nellie is delighted to have the opportunity of displaying her many pretty dresses. "She looks as young as ever," Mona says proudly, as arrayed in a soft dove-coloured silk, trimmed with blue, which set off her tall, slight figure to advantage, we were preparing to start of Tulse Hill, to a small croquet party. Maude and Hester were in the most irreproachable white frocks, with wide blue sashes, and both mother and children looked thoroughly prosperous and well-contented with themselves and the world.

"You still take to dark garments, Rhoda," Nellie said. "You can't think how a Tusmore silk would suit your complexion. Would it not mother?"

Dear mother, who was also to be of the party, and was sitting all ready in her black silk, lace shawl and close grey bonnet, said quietly, "Rhoda always knows what suits her; here is the carriage." For the sound of the feet of the bays was heard as the Tulse Hill carriage stopped before the door.

Maude and Hester were very happy as they sat by my side on the back seat, and looked with something of contempt upon the two little figures in brown holland who darted out of a lane at the foot of the hill, waving great branches of hawthorn at us, and wearing on their plain straw hats wreaths of young oak leaves. As their nurse was with them,

and Willy not far behind. "Father and mother are just on in front," he shouted; and we soon came up with, and passed Charlie Boddington and Margaret, on their way to the garden-party.

"I wonder the Boddingtons did not bring the children," Nellie said. "What little wild things they look; does Mrs. Boddington know it is a party at Tulse Hill?"

"I should think so," I answered shortly, for I knew the remark was directed at Margaret's very plain white piqué trimmed with black braid, in which, however, in my eyes at least, she looked better than any one when we were assembled on the lawn.

Janet is always glad to see me, and her greeting was very loving. Agnes is a pretty girl, about Bertha's age, and very much pleased to be on this visit with her mother, but a little anxious as to the inferiority of her appearance when compared with her cousins. And it is in this that I find fault with Janet; she encourages the feeling that ought to be repressed, and is always telling her children they can't expect things like their cousins, and that she always feels what a change it is for them to go back to their dingy home after Tulse Hill.

The Wynnes do not particularly attract me. Geoffrey Wynne is tall, slight, and languid; he speaks in a perpetual monotone, especially when wishing, as to-day, to make an impression on his company. He is a Fellow and Tutor of his College, and dabbles, of course, in literature, writes reviews and articles, and judges all books from a lofty

height of superiority. He is handsome, fair, and Saxon, with well-cut features; in fact, just the man for girls to exalt upon a pedestal, and think a hero; and I felt at once that my nieces would do so. There were signs of this on Oliffe's marriage day, and Bertha especially was full of his praises. Hilda Wynne is a great contrast to her brother—small and plain, her features irregular, but lighted up at times with a most pleasant smile.

The Wynnes' nominal home is with an old and infirm uncle near Oxford, but Hilda is apparently generally paying visits, and her brother lives in his college rooms. She looks up to him as a model of manhood, and I watched her face as she listened to his and Charlie Boddington's quiet talk under the big tulip-tree, with amusement. Mr. Wynne, to my mind, had the worst of the argument; but ideas differ, it seems, for Bertha said to me later in the afternoon:

"Mr. Boddington is not half as clever as Geoffrey, Aunt Rhoda. Do you know Hilda says that he has not taken anything like the honours at Oxford, and he can't talk half as well. You should hear him read poetry; Mamma made him read the best part of *Maud* last night: it is lovely. And Geoffrey has such a beautiful voice. Of course we call him Geoffrey; he is a relation, you know. Mamma looks upon him and Hilda as brother and sister——"

Sarah now came up to us, saying:

"Is it not odd that mamma should ask the Merediths to a small party like this? we scarcely know them, and that little Miss Meredith is so

pushing. I am sure I can't trouble myself to look after her, or either little Mrs. Sandford; they are not at ease here."

"I should think not," I answered, "when you leave them to themselves as you do." And here we were interrupted by Alice joining us.

"Bertha, Miss Meredith and her brother have not played yet; go and make up a set for them, your cousin Agnes will join you. And, Rhoda, I think you know Mrs. Meredith, will you take her up to the summer-house, the view will be clear to-day?"

Mrs. Meredith looked pleased at the attention of her hostess, and our party to the summer-house was increased by Margaret Boddington and the great Geoffrey himself. It was not to be expected that so distinguished a man should play croquet, and I saw Bertha casting longing looks from her place on the croquet-ground, where she was idly knocking about the balls with no very fixed purpose. Her want of interest infected the others, and the game, seen even from our vantage-ground, looked anything but a success.

We sat for some time in the summer-house, and if Mr. Wynne has stores of learning, he certainly did not bring them out for our edification.

Margaret tried to keep the conversation going with her wonted brightness, but it was like Bertha's game of croquet below, a hopelessly dull quartette.

Mr. Wynne stretched himself on one of the rough benches in the summer-house, and folded his hands behind his head. Presently he said, in that most irritating, drawling tone of his:

"Old Murray has been here, has he not?"

"Yes," Margaret answered; "if by old Murray you mean Mr. David Murray, Charlie's old Oxford friend? he has been here to see us twice, and I hope will return soon. Charlie and he are planning a walk in the Engadine together."

"What brought him back from Australia, I wonder?" Geoffrey Wynne said, ending with a half-suppressed yawn. "I thought he had taken to the colonial life for good."

"A loss to us if he had," was the dry answer.

"Humph—there was some mystery about him. He married somebody out of charity, didn't he? I was an undergraduate then, and I don't remember much about it."

"I dare say not," Margaret replied, in her most decided tone; "but those who do remember him then, know that he was, as he is, the most loyal-hearted and chivalrous of men."

We descended from our height to find croquet—even the most prolonged games—over, and every one engaged at the tables set out in the wide hall, with the loveliest fruit and flowers, iced drinks, and sundry light delicacies.

Mother was tired, and we were glad to ask for the carriage, for Maude had fallen down and greatly marred the beauty of her white dress, and Nellie had a headache, and was not in the very best of tempers.

Neither was I; and I was provoked with myself that my cogitations in my room that night were about Mr. Murray. Was he married? What was

this mystery which I heard hinted? I could ask Margaret, if I chose; I could even ask Charlie, but something holds me back. What business is it of mine? Just as if a man need tell all the ins and outs of his life to every chance acquaintance! If we cannot take people on trust, it is better to leave them alone.

"I thought Alice would have had rather a different set of people," Nellie said, rather complainingly, the next day. "There was scarcely any one from the country there."

"It was quite an informal little party," mother said; "and I am sure dear Alice manages everything beautifully."

"Oh! yes," Nellie allowed; "and of course these garden parties are a treat for the town people, those that can't very well be asked to dinner. It is quite a nice way of showing attention to them."

"How ridiculous!" I exclaimed. "Do you think the open air keeps off the infection of streets and chimney-pots?"

"You know what I mean, perfectly, Rhoda. Besides, Alice told me that, at her dinner-party on the 28th, I should meet several very nice people."

"Mrs. Meredith for one, and the Thornburys," I added, with some malice. And then we proceeded to discuss the various old friends whose visits Nellie had to return; and the croquet party at Tulse Hill was finally dismissed.

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LADY ALICE'S STORY.

“Blessed is he who hath found his work, let him ask no other blessedness. He has a Work, a life-purpose: he has found it, and will follow it.”—CARLYLE.

LADY ALICE STONY

"The story of a young girl's life, from her birth to her death, is a story of love and sacrifice. It is a story of a girl who was born in a poor family, but who was loved and cared for by her mother and father. She was a girl of great beauty and talent, and she was loved by many people. She was a girl who was born in a poor family, but who was loved and cared for by her mother and father. She was a girl of great beauty and talent, and she was loved by many people. She was a girl who was born in a poor family, but who was loved and cared for by her mother and father. She was a girl of great beauty and talent, and she was loved by many people."

LADY ALICE.

TULSE HILL,
September 1.

It is a long time since I have written my story of everyday life. I take it up to-day because I have so much to say, and now the two girls are away for a fortnight I enjoy a quiet hour in which to record all that has passed since June.

Our house was full of relations and friends from the beginning of June to the end of July. As I pass them in review I feel that I was able to make them all happy in my pretty home. First, there were Janet and Agnes.

Janet is so very nice; she has an uphill, difficult path, with small means and many children; but she is very gentle and patient, and I think does her best. I felt that I could hardly enter into her position—living in the heart of a town, but loving the country and flowers, and all beautiful things as much as I do.

I hope to send her a box of flowers as often as possible—not the treasures of the conservatory, but flowers from the beds, from which so many are cut for our rooms and table every day, and so little thought of them—scarlet and pink geraniums, calceolarias, and the like.

Agnes is a very dear girl, pretty, and tender and gentle in her manner.

Geoffrey and Hilda were with us a month; and throughout the time of Janet and Agnes' visit, the cares of a chaperon seemed to come upon me. Geoffrey, without perhaps knowing it, paid both our own Bertha and Agnes a great deal of attention. He would read to one, walk or ride with the other, and was constantly with either one or both of the two girls. Hilda said once or twice it was only Geoffrey's way of amusing himself, but I confess I was not quite easy about it.

Dear little Agnes was, I fear, more engrossed with him than was quite desirable, and a vehement wish to improve their German and Italian came upon her and Bertha. Beneath Geoffrey's languid, and to some people affectedly indifferent, manner there lies a true warm heart. I often wish he would speak in a more manly tone. It irritates Oliffe when he minces his words and delivers judgment on some author or poet, some book or picture with the air of infallibility. Rhoda and he did nothing but enter the lists with each other when they met, and I used to see a spark of amusement in Geoffrey's eye when Rhoda kindled into excitement about some question which to her was of great importance, to him a passing trifle.

Geoffrey is just in the position to try the real worth of a young man: honours at Oxford, a good social position, unlimited reading, which he has made the best use of, and has the gift of transmuting for the good of others; enough money to be indepen-

dent of exertion, and enough talent to criticise other people's productions; a power of conversation, too, and a manner which girls find irresistible. I remember how I used to look forward to his and Hilda's visits to Mervin, and how pleased I was even in London to meet and claim him as my cousin. Hilda is sensible and matter of fact; but she admires Geoffrey too much, and a little wholesome snubbing is what he wants. Mr. Boddington used to try it, I saw, and Geoffrey knew it, though he never betrayed it, or showed the latent vexation which I am sure he felt. Hilda felt it; she disliked the Boddingtons, and this did not bring her and Rhoda together.

The social aspect of my life presents difficulties I had not foreseen, and for which the three or four seasons I passed in London did not prepare me, nor the pleasant visits in large hospitable country houses when the season was over, which before my dear father's health failed I used to enjoy very much. I knew what was expected of me then, and I do not think I was ever troubled with the "Who is who" question, which appears in this neighbourhood to be all important. I find the two girls very difficult to influence in this, and I could laugh sometimes at the absurd notions which they propound. I can move Bertha always by touching her in her kindly heart, and showing her how her little foolish airs may really hurt the feelings of girls as well, or better born than she, whose advantages are not equal to hers. Just before Sarah and Rhoda left home, we went down to a concert at the Shire

Hall—the Philharmonic Concert. There was some delay in getting the carriage, and we were obliged to wait in the cloak-room. Sarah threw herself back in the only available chair, and said she was dreadfully tired. That nice bright little Miss Meredith came in with her mother, and was going to shake hands with Sarah, when she greeted her with a blank stare and a faint recognition, and Bertha gave Mrs. Meredith a little distant bow, when she said, “I think my hat is here; we are walking.”

I tried to make what reparation I could by finding the hat, and helping Mrs. Meredith with her wraps, but I saw she accepted my attention coldly, and I was very much vexed. When we were driving home, as Oliffe was not with us, I said:

“Sarah, why did you not speak to Miss Meredith?”

“Oh! I don’t know,” was the indifferent answer; “somehow one can’t always recollect which of the people in the town one knows.”

“Mrs. and Miss Meredith were at two of our garden-parties,” I said; “and indeed, Sarah, I think such manners as those you showed to-night second-rate and under-bred.”

“You have such odd ideas, mamma. I suppose we are not obliged to know everybody in Kingsholme? The Harrisons never call on anybody in the town, except the clergy.”

“Please do not quote the Harrisons to me,” I replied; “in my eyes, the Merediths are infinitely their superiors; and, however that may be, I hope,

Sarah, when you are with me you will remember I am responsible for your manners, as my daughter."

"What a fuss about nothing!" was the provoking response.

Bertha did not speak; but when I went into her room to say good-night, she put her arms round me, and said:

"You are so kind and good to every one, mamma, I don't wonder people love you."

"I know this little flattery is to turn off my lecture," I said; "but, dear Bertha, you do not consider how your manner to Miss Meredith to-night might wound and hurt her, at any rate make her uncomfortable, and feel that you had repulsed her."

"I like her very much in my heart," said Bertha, honestly; "and at one time we used to have Italian lessons with her at Aunt Rhoda's, but——"

"But what?"

"Ella Harrison told us the other day it was a mistake for us to have friendships with people who were not in the county, especially now you are come. She said you were sure not to like it—an earl's daughter, mamma! Mamma, why do you laugh?"

"I can't help it, Bertha, although such foolish nonsense ought to make me angry; and believe me, assumption of any kind is a true sign of vulgarity, for depend upon it, those who have the most right to do so, never stand upon their dignities. The most beautiful people are always the least vain; the really clever always the most easy to talk to; those of the

highest rank, always the least inclined to look down upon their neighbours."

"But we can't care for everybody, mamma," Bertha urged; "and some people are very disagreeable."

"I don't deny it," I said, bidding her good-night, "but courtesy should never fail, and remember manners are not idle, but the fruit of noble nature and a noble mind."

Bertha's kisses were as loving as ever; and I do see in her a fixed desire to please me, which is very pleasant.

I think I never felt happier than on the morning of the 25th of August, when Oliffe and I set off together for the Sarah Mine. The viewer, Mr. Simpson, had offered us his house for three days, and we drove round inland to Stonycroft. We lunched on the way at Lord Bironville's, who has a pretty place just at the edge of the moor.

The Bironvilles and several of our distant county neighbours have called on us since they returned from London; and my visiting list is likely to be full indeed.

Lady Bironville was overcome with astonishment at the idea of my staying at Stonycroft.

"My dear," she said, "you will be as black as a chimney-sweep. What dress do you mean to wear? Are you going down the mine?—horrid place. I never like to think of coal at all. The idea of poor wretches digging underground all their lives is too dreadful. I wonder what Anthony would say if I wanted to go down a mine."

"I don't feel sure that I am going down a mine," I said; "but I want to see the people. I have a friend at the Sarah Mine."

"You were always an amusing creature," Lady Bironville said; "and had friends amongst the coachmen's wives in the mews behind Park Lane, I remember—dirty old women!"

"This friend, on the contrary," I said, "is a handsome girl, named Cherry. She rushed into the water and saved me from drowning last June. Her husband is one of the overmen in the mine; and she is a very fascinating friend, I assure you."

Lady Bironville leaned back and sighed.

"Dear me! I wish I could find anything to amuse me! Even the adventure of being half drowned would be better than nothing. There is absolutely nothing to do in the country; and every one is playing at cross purposes this year about the shooting. However, Anthony has got a few people to take pity on us for the second week in September."

Lady Bironville has six dear little children; and is young and rich, and sings well, and has, one would say, nothing left to wish for; and yet this is her cry, "Nothing to do!" How I pitied her as I drove away from Heronsfield with Oliffe, in the bright August afternoon. It was delightful to have my husband all to myself, and to feel, as I do every day, that he is drawing nearer and nearer to me. Many times of late he has gone down to the Abbey with me at eight o'clock; and he is so ready to hear and enter into all my hopes and plans.

We reached Stonycroft about six o'clock; a straggling irregular town, approached from Barstone by a branch railway, which conveys the coal to the midland counties. The place has increased of late years on the Barstone side; for there is a group of ugly pasteboard villas near the station, which we passed on our way to the High Street, where there is a market, a succession of low bow-windowed shops and dwelling-houses, and the old parish church at the end—the miners' church of which Oliffe spoke. As the carriage drew up at the Bull Inn, we were met by landlord and waiter, who bowed low to Oliffe, and were profuse in their attentions.

"What rooms, sir, do you require?" and the host seemed much surprised when Oliffe said he did not require any: that we were going to sleep at Mr. Thompson's house close to the mine; and that he should only trouble him to look after the servant, and the carriage and horses. Kelly was to follow us with our luggage in a spring-cart, which the Bull possessed, and Oliffe and I walked on to the Sarah Mine.

I felt eager to get there at once, and hastily disclaimed all idea of fatigue, and begged we might set off as soon as possible. The road across the moor was plain enough; for the line of trams, drawn by large powerful horses, marked the way. The chimney of the shaft was also a beacon, just two miles and a half before us. The heather and gorse were stunted and bare, and a black dusty track to the left of the tramway showed the foot-

path. We diverged a little, and Oliffe showed me the old farmhouse which belonged to his father-in-law, and where some of his family had lived for years, unknowing of the gold beneath their feet; for coal is more surely gold to the finder than the precious metal itself sometimes.

As we drew near the miners' houses I began to realise where I was. The rows of closely packed dwellings, the little black children clustering at the doors, the big stalwart men smoking their short pipes, the noise of the restless engine at the shaft. Mr. Thompson's house stood a little apart, it had a garden in front, or rather a plot of grass, and there were two or three better class cottages near it, inhabited Oliffe said by the overmen. Mr. Thompson had been unexpectedly called away to inspect a mine in a neighbouring county where something was wrong. The Sarah not being large enough to employ one viewer entirely, he takes other duties. A neat, pleasant-looking servant received us, and I was shown at once to my room, and asked to ring when I was ready for dinner. I threw open the window the first thing, and before I left the room I saw the dressing-table was covered with black dust; then I knew why it was that the windows were kept hermetically sealed. The overman left in charge by Mr. Thompson during his absence came while we were at dinner, and I started with pleasure when the servant said his name was Nat Penrose. "Cherry's husband," I exclaimed. The two sitting-rooms were divided by a narrow-passage, and when we had finished dinner we went across

it to find Nat Penrose. He was standing by the window, and was as fine a picture of a working man as I ever saw. He was very respectful in his manner, without anything like cringing, and explained to Oliffe that he was to show him anything he wished till Mr. Thompson returned. A telegram had come for him at four o'clock, and he was obliged to start at once. The water was making way in the Duchess Mine, he thought, and "our viewer, he is thought no end of for an opinion," Nat said.

"How is your wife?" I asked at last, when arrangements had been made for the next day. "May I come and see her?"

A cloud passed over Nat's fine face, and his voice was sad in its tone.

"She bain't no ways well, my lady. Please the Lord she could see where to find peace I'd be glad; but she is young—my poor girl is very young. She will be glad enough to see you, my lady; she thinks no end of your kindness."

"Well, I will come to-morrow;" and then the arrival of Kelly with the luggage occupied me while Oliffe went out with Penrose.

Kelly was full of wonder at the scene before her, the kindling fires showing red and lurid in the dusk of the evening. The strings of pitmen coming home for their nightly wash, the strange, unconventional, rough life into which we were transported, did not please Kelly.

"Talk of our own village," she said, "talk of our people round Mervin, why they be princes born to

these! Such language as I heard as I came along! You must put cotton wool in your ears, my lady, if you go out amongst them. And see the dirt! Why your collar looks as if it had been powdered with soot. Do, pray, my lady, let me put you tidy."

I submitted to Kelly's operation, and then went down to watch from the window of the sitting-room, which looked down one row of houses, and to the left of which were the better class of cottages I mentioned just now, belonging to the overmen. Sounds of a violin soon reached me, then not very musical voices singing, then two men, evidently very much the worse for liquor, went tottering past. The light from the burning heaps of small coal showed more and more brightly as the darkness increased, the stars came out on high, and, in spite of Kelly's report of my collar, I opened the window and stood by it, looking and listening. The violin had ceased, so had the rude rough singing, and I heard different sounds from a square building, something like a child's Noah's ark, not a hundred yards from the garden gate. It was a hymn tune, and a man's voice led the strain. When the singing was over, there was the same voice again—pleading, earnest, tender—and, as I listened intently, wishing I could catch the words, a woman's figure at the gate caught my attention.

Even in the dim light I felt sure it was Cherry. She saw me, and I beckoned to her, going to the door to admit her.

"My lady! my lady!" she exclaimed, with all the eagerness of a child, "I am thankful to see you!

Hark," she said, as she stood for a moment by the door, "that's my Nat preaching and praying. I believe the master is there."

"And why are not you there, Cherry?" I asked.

"No, no; he is too good for me, and he knows it now. I always told him so, but he wouldn't believe it. Oh, my lady, I am so miserable, I am!"

She buried her face in her hands, and sobbed bitterly.

"If only the child had lived," she said, "it would have been better; but I don't seem to care what becomes of me."

I made the poor girl sit down, and prayed to God to help me to say the right thing to her.

Very brokenly, and in fitful gasps, the story came out. Nat thought dancing and merrymaking sins, and she was that dull and miserable she was glad to forget herself sometimes. So she had been again and again to the Rest, the little public-house, where there is dancing most nights, and once to Stonycroft, to a dance there at the Bull. She thought Nat would be in the mine that night, but he was at home, and sitting up for her. She meant no harm, and the wife of one of the other overmen was with her, and several more. Nat did not scold her, but he looked at her with a dreadful look, and, though it is three weeks ago, he has not forgiven her.

"But, oh, my lady, I can't be different—I can't go to these prayer-meetings and pretend to be good; and it is a horrid place to live in—there's so much wickedness amongst the people, and they be as black in mind as in body when they come out of

the mine. I did like that pretty dress you sent me, my lady," Cherry said suddenly. "Nat, he thought it too smart; but Jim Bright said it was just what became me."

"I should not care for any one's opinion but my husband's, Cherry," I said; "I would rather please him than any one."

"Ah, my lady," Cherry said pathetically, "it is so easy for you to be good, but it is so hard for the like of me."

The words haunted me. Yes; and if it is easy, as Cherry said, for me to be good, shall I not try to make the path less difficult for her?

Oliffe was very much impressed with what he had seen that evening at the mine. Ever since he had been the proprietor he had never slept a night there, and he talked to me long and seriously about it. Some higher and better recreation ought to be provided for the people than the dances and card-playing at the Rest, and the services of the Church brought within their reach. Oliffe was much struck with Nat Penrose, and said, in preaching, he had a rugged eloquence and earnestness which went to his heart. There were a mere handful of men and women in the chapel, and the rest of the six or seven hundred miners and the families were at the Rest, or another less creditable place of resort.

We spent all the next day (Saturday) in going over the place, and while Oliffe went down the mine, equipped in the dress which so transformed him that I should not have known him from Nat Penrose, I went about talking as I could here and there

to the women. Very few of the children could read, and the whole tone of the people was indifferent. Some of the cottages were well-kept and tidy, others miserably the reverse. I went back to Cherry's cottage. She was watching for me, and had everything in beautiful order. Her love of pretty things showed itself in a way unusual for her station in life. Bunches of Michaelmas daisies and lavender, with the hardy, thin-blossomed fuchsia, were in various glasses about the little parlour, and the kitchen was scrupulously clean, all the pewter shining like silver. The outhouse, where Nat washed, was also tidy, and the great tubs and large brush and flannel, set all ready by the pump for his much-needed ablutions when he came in. There were three rooms above, and in one of these stood the empty cradle and a chest of drawers, which contained the dead baby's little wardrobe, and some other things. Cherry stood silently as I looked round here, and then suddenly clasping her hands, she said:

"Ah, my lady, if I had only the child, Nat's heart would turn to me then for his sake."

"But, Cherry," I said, "your husband's heart does turn to you, only you must try to please him. Can you read and write? You can sew well, I am sure."

"Yes," she said, "I can do a lot of things of that sort, for my poor Grannie taught me, and went to school down at Culmemouth."

A bright idea crossed me now that Cherry might open a little school, and employ her time, now

heavy on her hands, by teaching some of the young children round her.

Here would be an interest for her, and while it took a burden off some of the many-childed mothers round her, it would comfort her own sad heart. I looked at the poor girl's little shelf of books, and determined to increase the number of the volumes. She showed me the top shelf, and said it was Nat's, and she did not care for his books at all. I could not wonder. There were "Calls to the Unconverted," an old edition of the "Book of Martyrs," and sermons in very small print. The Bible and Prayer-Book I had given Cherry in the summer were kept apart, and evidently much valued, but I saw not much used.

"Do you read this book every day, Cherry?" I asked.

"Oh no, my lady. Nat reads out of his big old Bible every night, and I sit by; but he won't let me knit or sew, and I often fall fast asleep, and when he is praying I can't keep awake. Do you think I am very wicked, my lady?"

"I think you are making a great mistake, Cherry, and I know if you loved God as your husband does you would be happier; but I am going to set you to work if I can. You shall teach some of the little girls to read and knit, and take them off their mothers' hands, and you shall write to me and tell me how you get on."

The beautiful eyes brightened, and Cherry said:

"Fancy me a teacher! But, my lady, if I get

into one of my tempers I may smack the children. Have you thought of that?"

I could not help smiling.

"Well, Cherry," I said, "I don't expect a married woman to behave like a spoiled child, or to indulge in bad tempers; and if you will promise me to use it I will write a little prayer for you to say when you begin your day's work with the children, and that will help you."

"Perhaps they won't like the children to come to me; and, my lady, I should not like the dirty little things to come into my place, for it is pretty tidy," she said, looking round with pardonable pride.

"It is indeed," I answered; "and I have no intention of allowing your pretty neat home to be invaded. I have a better plan than that."

Before I left Stonycroft on Monday I had so far matured my plan that I had taken an empty room in the cottage of an old miner, who only occupied one side, having neither wife nor child, and had given the carpenter directions to put up a desk, provide a few benches and stools, and persuaded six or eight mothers to send their children to Mrs. Penrose's school. I had many rebuffs, but on the whole I was satisfied, and I have to-day despatched a parcel of pictures for the walls of the room, large printed books of easy words, knitting worsted and cotton, and a box full of needles and tapes and other useful things. My great trouble is that I cannot go very soon to see how the plan is working, but I shall anxiously expect Cherry's first letter.

Oliffe and I went to the Church at Stonycroft twice on Sunday, staying to luncheon at the Bull between the services. We saw a few miners at the afternoon service, but none in the morning. A Baptist chapel was full, and I heard that those miners' families who frequented any place of worship were mostly to be found there.

Nat Penrose held forth in the little Noah's Ark in the evening, and sometimes the minister from the chapel came out to speak to the people. But the Church is silent, alas! for the service at Stonycroft was dull and lifeless, and the sermon was a dry and bare statement of facts with no heart-warming word of love. It must be my earnest endeavour to get a small church built near the Sarah mine, and perhaps one day I may see it rising out of the blackness around—a light in the darkness. But I must not press too much upon Oliffe just now; he is full of other cares, for they have decided on sinking another shaft and working the new vein. There will be a great increase of hands needed; and our responsibility will increase in proportion. There is at present a very good feeling amongst the miners, but who can tell if it will last? Strikes are getting so common, and Oliffe says only two years ago the Duchess miners had a strike and infected those in the Sarah with discontent.

In spite of Lady Bironville's satire, I felt sorry that I had not gone down into the mine; but Oliffe did not wish me to do so, and there was no great object in my seeing the dark regions underground, those on the surface are enough for me.

Sept. 4.—The two girls have come home, Sarah with a bad cold, and very irritable and hard to please.

Bertha is full of spirits and happiness. When I went to kiss her last night she said:

“Mamma, do you know that Geoffrey came to Hillersden while we were there?”

“To Hillersden!” I exclaimed; “surely he does not know the Willoughbys well enough to invite himself?”

“Oh yes, he has coached Jack Willoughby for his smalls; such a stupid boy, he will be plucked again, Geoffrey says. Mamma, you don’t mind my caring very, very much about him, do you?”

“About the stupid boy!” I said.

“No, the cleverest and most wonderful man in the whole world; he knows Sanscrit and Icelandic and—but, mamma, don’t say anything till he says something to you—promise, mamma. I can’t think how it is he can care for me, for I know next to nothing, except I do know that he is superior to every one.”

I thought that was just the knowledge which would be unwholesome to communicate to Geoffrey, but I was quite ready to keep Bertha’s counsel, and pleased that she should put confidence in me. In my heart I had misgivings that Geoffrey was rather more general in his admiration than Bertha guessed, but I returned her long and emphatic embraces with all my heart, and so we parted for the night.

Cousin Mary is coming to-morrow for her first visit, and Oliffe is going to shoot at Lord Biron-

ville's and afterwards he goes to the Willoughbys'. He will be away a week—a long time it seems to me: but it is so good for him to have the shooting, and he is to meet several gentlemen he wants to talk to. I hear Mrs. Boddington is come home, and I must go and consult her about an amateur concert I want to get up for the new wing at the hospital which I want to set afloat for Sick children. It is so greatly needed here.

with a goodly company of friends in the morning
I will be away a week - a long time I know
but it is so good for me to have the opportunity
and I am most anxious to go. I shall be
back on 1st Nov. I shall be glad to hear from
you and go and see you. I shall be glad to
I want to get up the river now with the boat
which I want to set about for the children. It is
so greatly needed here.

RHODA'S STORY.

The earth is waiting like a Queen of old
To strip her of her jewels rich and rare:
But never did she look more royal fair
Than in the last moments of her waning power.

And O Last Days!

Wrapt in your tender haze,

Have you not ever known

A sweet sad lustre which is all your own?

Life's autumn, too, has a like tale to tell.

When Hope unfurls her rainbow-tinted wings,
And the glad heart, as at a matin bell,

Upward once more to Love and joyance springs.

O fair bright days,

Wrapt in your golden haze!

We dream it is again our halcyon time,

We think we may regain our summer prime.

E. M.

RHODA'S STORY

The story is written in a simple and
easy style, and is a good one for
the young. It is a story of a girl
who is very kind and who is very
kind to all the people who are
around her. She is a very good
girl, and she is a very kind girl.

This is a story of a girl who is
very kind and who is very kind
to all the people who are around
her. She is a very good girl, and
she is a very kind girl. She is
a very good girl, and she is a
very kind girl. She is a very good
girl, and she is a very kind girl.

M. M.

RHODA.

WEST MALVERN,
August, 1870.

WE, that is mother and I, came here more than a month ago. I found lodgings near us for Margaret Boddington and the children; and Charlie and Mr. Murray came for a few days, before starting together for a walk in the Engadine.

I saw a great deal of Mr. Murray, we had several long walks over the hills; and I think I have talked to him more than to any one I ever knew.

How odd it is to respond with no effort to some people, and feel like a brick wall to others! I have been trying to make up my mind as to what it is in Mr. Murray which attracts me so much: and I could not write it in plain words or tell it if I tried.

Life to him has evidently been full of disappointment and sadness, and yet how bright and cheerful he can be!

He lives in the keenest enjoyment of small things, and nothing is lost on him. Willy says he is the jolliest man in the world, for he knows the name of every moth and butterfly; and Willy is

just now bitten with a mania for scampering over the hills with a green gauze net, and chasing impossible butterflies in every direction. He is setting up a collection, he says, and Mr. Murray is to name them all. Not a very arduous task, as at present only three—or, at most, four poor little moths are impaled in the box Margaret has provided for her boy's captives.

Then the two little girls have their word of praise. Mr. Murray is next best in the world to father, Lily says; for he knows everything in history, and tells beautiful stories of the old Danes and Saxons, like the one he told us about Sigrid.

"Yes, and he knows everything mother plays, and really likes it, and does not say, 'Thank you, how pretty!' as stupid people do, when she finishes," May adds triumphantly.

And I in my heart think one of his great perfections is his chivalrous attention to my mother. He will walk by her donkey-chair; he will help her to fold her shawl round her; he defers to her when she speaks; and I could not be surprised that she said on the evening when he and Charlie left us:

"How we miss Mr. Murray!"

While he was with us we made several excursions, not at all in the beaten track of Malvern donkey-riders and pedestrian or picnic parties, but away on the Herefordshire side of the country, amid orchards and grassy dells, and farmhouses nestled among shadowy trees, and breezy commons where geese cackled, and a solitary horse, getting past

work, nibbled at the short grass, and pricked up one ear at our approach. Little churches, too, and moss-grown tombstones, with their quaint inscriptions hardly legible, in the quiet God's acre, where the dead lay under the shade of the yew-tree, and the jackdaws chattered in the grey tower above. These were delightful days; I can scarcely count them; but I dare say they were not more than four or five. I felt within me new spring of life and youth: and there is something wonderfully invigorating in the Malvern air. On the day but one before our two gentlemen were to start, we planned a longer excursion than any before attempted. But when we woke in the morning all the hills were shrouded in mist, and we said it was not the day for the country.

"Shall we go to Worcester, and see the Cathedral and the Potteries?" Charlie said.

But Mr. Murray moved an amendment.

"Let us go to Gloucester; I want to see the Cathedral there. Gilbert Scott has been taking it in hand, and I am curious as to the result. I saw a letter about the big east window, too, of its having been cleaned and set up again: and I should like to see it."

So as we only wanted a straw's weight to turn the balance, to Gloucester we were to go. Not all of us. Margaret begged off, and preferred a quiet day with mother; and only Charlie and myself, and the two girls and Mr. Murray, started by an early train.

It is a misfortune when first impressions, either

of persons or places are unfavourable; and as the train drew up at a long, dingy platform of a low, dingy station, I felt anything but kindly disposed to Gloucester, and was inclined to quarrel with Mr. Murray for bringing us there. If the station is untaking, so is the part of the town nearest to it: a cattle-market, crowded with miserable, closely-penned beasts, was the first thing to notice—at least, it was the first thing I noticed—and I heartily echoed May's exclamation:

"Is not this a horrid place, father?"

We walked on, not in the most buoyant spirits, and inquired our way to the cathedral. Its great tower, rising grandly before us, seemed to signal to us to come near; and the precincts would surely be more inviting than the cattle-market. We were directed to the Cross, whence four streets diverge to the four points of the compass; but we missed our way, and got into a succession of back lanes, which were scarcely more promising than the cattle-market. Dejectedly the children plodded along; and Mr. Murray, as the mover of the Gloucester excursion, came in for some derision.

"Where are we now?" Charlie exclaimed, as we reached a street full of market carts and vociferous farmers. "What street is this?"

"Please, sir, it's Air Lane," was the humble answer of a little girl.

"Air Lane! rather an inappropriate name," said Charlie. "But I want to get to the cathedral."

"Go on, then," broke in a twanging, loud voice from a woman standing at the door of a public-

house; "go on, and turn to your left; and you'll see the cathedral fast enough."

"My good woman," said Mr. Murray, putting his hand kindly on the little girl's head, whose mother had given her a rough push and told her not to be so bold; "my good woman, we have seen the cathedral ever since we arrived in Gloucester, and apparently there is not much beside to see; but we want to get inside it, and that seems a hard matter."

"Aye, I dare say," said the woman. "I never tries; I leave that to the gentry. Thank you kindly, sir," as Mr. Murray dropped a shilling into the little girl's hand, who stood looking up at him with wondering eyes. "Mary Jane, where's your manners?"

"If Mary Jane has no manners, she has a sweet smile," said Mr. Murray as we moved on to overtake the others.

And now we turned, and went down a long, dull road, and came at last to the cathedral, rising grandly from its well-kept gardens, where dahlias, and fuchsias, asters and scarlet salvias were heaped in masses of many colours in well-arranged beds.

The close-shaven grass stretches to the grey walls of the noble church; and I shall not soon forget the effect of the first sight of the Ladye Chapel, with the noonday sun striking the windows of that "building without walls," as the verger expressed it with pardonable pride.

I will not transfer a paragraph of Murray's "Cathedrals of England" into my book, nor tell of

the great Norman pillars of the nave and the dark mazes of the crypt, lighted but faintly from the outer world; silent, dim, and mysterious, with their old, old columns and shadowy roof and uneven floor.

I will not say how Mr. Murray studied every pictured knight and noble, distinguished in the French wars, which are commemorated in the wonderful east window. Nor how he and Charlie had a sharp discussion as to some names just laid bare by scraping the chapter-house walls, and supposed to be contemporary warriors of the time of Robert Duke of Normandy. Poor reckless Robert, who lies here—let us hope in peace—his vanity unhurt by the great highly-coloured effigy of himself in bog oak, which is imprisoned in a wire cage in a side chapel.

We had our luncheon at a shop in one of the four streets. And then, while Charlie and the children went to explore the Spa, Mr. Murray and I returned to the afternoon service at the cathedral. By this time the sun was shining gloriously, and the floor of the nave was sown thick with emeralds and sapphires, ruby and topaz, thrown from the coloured windows like so many gems. I am conscious that this afternoon has left its mark on my life. Why or how, I don't care to find out; but I was very happy. We paced about, Mr. Murray and I, in the cloisters after service; the northern side was illuminated by the sun, which made beautiful pathways of glory across the pavement. After a band of deep shadow, a very bright beam

fell on a name carved on a tablet at our feet, "Constantia." The word seemed to live: and as the sun kissed it, as it has done every bright April and August afternoon for more than a hundred years, it seemed to appeal to us for a passing thought. "Constantia"—that was all; for the long Latin inscription is all but illegible.

"Maiden, wife, or mother, I wonder which?" Mr. Murray said; "in her full prime and greatly loved, I dare say. A nice quiet resting-place for Constantia, with the spirits of the old monks hovering round her."

"We always call them old," he went on with a laugh presently, "forgetting what young rollicking fellows they sometimes were."

He had thrown off the sad tone now; and so we left Constantia, the sunshine yet lying on her name.

Then we talked of many things: of the power of suffering to exalt the very commonest material to something of a saint, in the eyes of the people; and, as an instance, our poor King Edward, second of his name, whose miserable weakness and folly, not to say sins and crimes, were all forgotten and redeemed by his barbarous death, when holy men bore him with reverent care to the cathedral church of Gloucester, and buried him as befitted a Christian prince. Then how soon uprose the elaborate shrine to his memory, where his great son came to pay his rich offerings, with good Philippa, his tender wife; and the stream of pilgrims set in continuously, with offerings many and

varied—their numbers so great, that the New Inn in Northgate Street, a hostelry still bearing the sacred monogram over the gate, was built for their accommodation.

“Yes,” I said, “suffering and pain always idealise people.”

“Even old Mrs. Butt?” my companion said. “By-the-bye, I hope you have looked after my friend, Mrs. Butt.”

“Yes,” I said; “but I will be candid. I don’t like visiting poor old women; I have no gift that way.”

“Cultivate it then,” was the short answer.

“But,” I persisted, “there are heaps of people who have the gift. Let them exercise it; it surely is no good doing a thing badly which others do well.”

I looked up at Mr. Murray’s profile, and saw the smile was gone from his face. “People go to sleep when I read to them; Mrs. Butt always does,” I went on. “And she is so grumbly; then an old man in the same house is worse. Alice made me look after him too; he breaks out into long stories about his rheumatics, and tells me what an unpleasant neighbour Mrs. Butt is! and—why,” I said, “you look as if a woman of my age ought to tell a different story—to say district-visiting was my delight!”

We were out on the lawn before the cathedral now; but Mr. Murray still held his hat in his hand.

There was no answer to my question at first; at last he said:

"I don't think the smallest grain we can help to lift from the great mass of suffering a lost labour. Evil and ignorance bring pain and trouble. It does us good in our every-day life to look on them in their meanest and most dismal forms sometimes; and I think—" he stopped. "Don't be vexed with me. I want to keep you as a friend." With a sudden gesture he put out his hand and took mine. "But I think a woman's mission is to help the poor and sick and sad; she can do it so much better than we can—has finer perceptions, nicer sensibilities."

"I have not," I said vehemently; and yet I felt so humbled! "I have not. I care for very few things or people; and I never think about those who don't interest me. I have a friend—you know her, she was with us at Culmemouth that day—she visits everybody, and keeps a register of measles and accidents and hip disease among the poor, and misfortunes of every sort amongst the rich. She is very kind—everyone says so—but I can't be kind in that way. I care with all my might if mother has a threatening of bronchitis, or if I see Charlie Boddington breaking down, or Margaret overwrought and anxious, and I care about Francis and Janet, and Nellie and her children, and I have cared a great deal about the Tulse Hill folk; of course now I am superfluous, so I withdraw a little of my sympathy. But to say that I mind particularly about everybody's sore throats, and disappointments in marriage, and stupid sons, failures in examinations—I don't."

"I see what you mean," was the quiet answer; "but I don't say I think you are right."

"You would like to see me go into a sisterhood?"

"No, indeed!" was the quick rejoinder; "I don't think that is your vocation."

"Oh! Rhoda, Rhoda, father says we must make haste or we shall miss the train."

May had run on at her father's bidding to tell us to join him at a distant corner of the cathedral gardens. So once again through Hare Lane, and once again through the dirty streets, once again past the market, where the ranks of way-worn cattle were thinned since the morning; and soon the glory of the sunshine on the close-shaven grass and the cloister floor were like a dream.

I was silent for the most part; and when we turned out at Ashchurch to wait for our train, I heard the children—one on each side of Mr. Murray—eagerly saying, "Go on, go on!" then I knew he had been telling them a story: and I found it was the story of Constantia, whose name the August sunshine had kissed on the cloister floor for a hundred years. Constantia—constant in alms-deeds, and good words: the poor loved her, and thus in death she is remembered; for the sun brightens her name once a year for a short space, so that all who pass by may see it, and say: "There lies the good Constantia, who was the sunshine of her home and the comforter of the poor, for thirty-two fleeting years, which to her were as the portal of the Higher and Better Life."

"Isn't that a lovely story, Rhoda?" May said, nestling up to me on the hard, uneasy bench which afforded our only resting-place. "Rhoda, are you very tired?"

I did not speak, but I put my arm round May, and held her close.

Everyone was tired when we got to Malvern. There was an omnibus to take the children and me; the two gentlemen walked. Mother thought us late, and was anxious about me. Both she and Mona said I looked tired, and busied themselves for my comfort. I went to bed early, and was just settling off to sleep when some one came quietly up to my bed.

"Rhoda!"

"Oh, mother dearest, what do you want?"

"Are you well, Rhoda?" asked the dear kind voice.

"Yes," I said; but I held out my arms, and flinging them round mother's neck, I cried in the most feeble way, and lay awake sobbing long after mother had cooled my forehead with eau de Cologne, and left me to myself. I don't often cry; and I think this feminine weakness, or rather its indulgence, did me good. I had a strange dream when I went to sleep at last, a real vision of the night, and I mean to put it into verse some day.

Charlie Boddington and Mr. Murray were off early the next morning, and we have had very good accounts of them. Charlie writes delightful letters to Margaret, and certainly has the power of description in a few words—a rare gift.

I was surprised one day to see a letter for me from Mr. Murray; it was merely to tell me of the title of a book we had been speaking of, and which he had forgotten at the time. He sent messages to the children, and asked about the number of impaled moths in Willy's box; then he asked to be remembered to mother, and that was all. No, not quite all: there was a postscript, which said:

"I think the Gloucester cloisters the most beautiful in the world, and I look back to our talk over Constantia's grave with an abiding pleasure."

So do I. I am not in love, or foolish and romantic at seven-and-thirty; but I do like Mr. Murray, I do enjoy him; and the way he speaks to me—freely and without constraint—has a charm. He is so honest and clear. When I am with him, it is as if a brisk fresh wind were invigorating me: and I quicken into life, and all my bristles seem to be blown away.

Sept. 1.—Margaret and the children are gone home. Mother and I remain here for another fortnight; and Agnes, Janet's eldest girl, is come to be with us, with one of the younger children. Alice has written mother a long account of her visit with Oliffe to the Sarah mine. How full she is of improving the condition of the miners! I hope she won't spoil that dark-eyed Cherry and take her out of her place. It is rather a rash thing to set that wild girl up as school-mistress. I find poor little Agnes' head is very full of Geoffrey Wynne; and her conversation is constantly recurring to that time

at Tulse Hill when he was there. Of course it is not for me to say what I think: that Geoffrey Wynne is one of those typical young gentlemen who are fond of having a good many strings to their bow—and one does as well as another.

Sept. 10.—The Thornburys have arrived to-day; and Dora looks very well in a suit of brown holland and red ribbons, and a black hat with a little bit of scarlet in it. The moment she had greeted mother and me, and had put her alpen-stock into a corner, I saw that she was full of some news; and she began by asking if we had heard from Tulse Hill lately.

“Yes,” mother said; “my son Oliffe wrote to me yesterday—he has been shooting at Moor End—they are all well.”

“Oh yes, all well, I suppose; the two girls have come home, and old Mrs. Mitchell is arrived at Tulse Hill. I don’t see much of them, as you know; but Bertie did find time to call the other afternoon. Sarah was in the pony-carriage, but did not get out; she was muffled up as if it were winter. Mrs. Boddington and the children are at home now, and Mr. Murray has been with them.”

“That is a mistake, Dora,” I said confidently; “he is walking in Switzerland with Charles Boddington.”

“My dear, I know you always think you are right; but I saw Mr. Murray myself more than once. He went up to Tulse Hill several times; and he was talking most earnestly to Lady Alice at the

little shrubbery gate one afternoon when Miss Sambourne passed."

Mother looked at me inquiringly, and I said:

"Betsy Sambourne's eyes are not to be trusted; and I can only say, none of our letters from home mention Mr. Murray's name."

"Oh," said Dora with a provoking little laugh, "I did not suppose you were ignorant of Mr. Murray's whereabouts, Rhoda!"

"Will you drive with us this afternoon, Dora?" I said, not at all liking the turn the conversation had taken, and wishing to make a diversion. "Mother and I are going to have a basket-carriage, and Agnes and little Winnie are going to ride donkeys."

Dora assented to my plan; and so we got over the day.

Now, alone in my room as I write this, I say to myself that I have no right to speculate about Mr. Murray. Still, it is odd that he should have left Charles Boddington and come to Kingsholme. I have been reading Margaret's letter again, and she says Charlie will not be home for another fortnight. Why should she be silent about Mr. Murray? Then, again, there is Alice; though I do not believe a word about her standing talking to Mr. Murray at the shrubbery gate. Still, I suppose he has been there; Geoffrey Wynne's languid voice comes back to me with the words, "There was some mystery about Murray." Well, if there is a mystery, it need not disturb me, except that I thought I knew Mr. Murray so well, and perhaps I

am quite outside after all and really know nothing about him.

TUDOR VILLA,
September 14.

Home again to the old daily round; and yet I feel that something has stirred within me unknown in past days.

It was all true. Mr. Murray was here for a day or two, for I asked Margaret to-day, and she said:

"Yes, business has called him back to England, and he has left Charlie at Zermatt."

"What was the urgent business?" I asked.

"I hardly know myself; but you may be sure he had very good reasons for coming back."

"Margaret, do you know if Mr. Murray went to see Alice?"

Margaret did not laugh as I expected, and deny it; but she said:

"Yes, I think he did go to Tulse Hill more than once. But, Rhoda, I do not wish to pry into his affairs."

Was this meant as a reproach for me—pry into his affairs—as if I could want to do so. I will mention his name no more, and put every thought of him away. I could not have believed I should be so foolish; call no man wise or happy before he dies. I was conscious that Margaret was watching my face, and with the quick sympathy of affection read what was in my heart.

"Dear old Rhoda," she said, putting her arms round me, "of this, I think, we may be sure: Mr.

Murray has a good and pure motive for everything he does. Now tell me what you think of Lady Alice's plan of a concert for the new wing to the Hospital for Children?"

"I hate concerts for charity," I said. "And do imagine the fuss there will be about the parts—who is to sing this, and who won't sing that. No one will be satisfied, and in the end there will only be a few pounds' profit."

"There is a great deal of trouble in raising money in any way," Margaret said; "but I prefer a concert to a bazaar. People do know what they are paying for; and are not entrapped by smart sofa cushions stuffed with sawdust, and deal bookshelves stained with walnut-juice and passed off for oak, or worse than all, teased to take shares in raffles. I like Lady Alice's energy, and it is such quiet energy—no fuss, and no great talk. We must make up the list of names for the patronesses and settle the programme. My friend Miss Masters will come and sing I know; and I don't mind how much I play."

"Every one seems in the most disinterested self-denying humour," I said, "except me. But don't you think Alice looks very pale, and she is not in her usual spirits? To be sure, I have only seen her once—when she came down to see mother yesterday afternoon. I have not been to Tulse Hill yet."

But Margaret would not say anything about Alice's looks, and I have a disagreeable feeling of mystery.

I read aloud as usual to mother all the evening, and I have done my best to banish uneasy thoughts; but the question will keep recurring, What brought Mr. Murray to Kingsholme? and another follows—what concern is it of mine?

I have put my dream into verse, and may as well copy it from my blotted first-draft into this book. I do not think there was ever a dream more vivid and more distinct in detail, nor, I verily believe, one fated to be more literally fulfilled.

MY DREAM.

I had a dream of you one night;—
We stood in some cathedral old and grey,
Where the great organ rolled its waves of sound,
And voices in glad chorus rose around.
The vaulted roof was overhead,
With arches springing skyward!
Beneath our measured tread
The floor was painted bright with gold and red,
Thrown from the many pictured forms of saint and king,
A message from the quiet and holy dead.

From the high eastern window there streamed down,
Ruby and amethyst, and sapphire blue,
Glowing like jewels in a royal crown,
And shadowy colours of a softer hue,
Mellowed like those in the Madonna's gown,
As Raphael showed it to us long ago.
The people came and went around us,
But we heeded not; nor did I question why
These seemed to note none of the sights we saw,
But careless passed and left us—you and I.

At last I thought our time had come;
With lingering feet we turned to leave the place,

For we two now must pass beneath the door,
And see no more the glory and the grace
Which held us spell-bound by its mystic power;
A touch of sudden fear thrilled through me then,
That never should we find that goodly church again.

Outside at last; and here in sunshine bright
We stood amidst a garden of fair flowers:
Gay golden daffodils that danced in light,
And paler primroses, and emerald bowers,
Where all the treasures April could unfold
Were blended into beauties manifold,
Through which the soft south breezes faintly sigh,
And we were there together—you and I.

The grand cathedral with its solemn grace,
The spring's glad beauty in its brilliant glow,
All seemed too lovely far, to find a place
Here in this lower world of care and woe:
I knew it must be so, and all too soon;
The chilling shadow of a future pain
Came sweeping over me, like fall of autumn rain.

For out beyond the garden, fair and sweet,
And far beyond that vast cathedral's shade,
I saw a long straight road, where weary feet
In every time their pilgrimage have made:
The way stretched out before me drear and sad,
No singing birds were there to make the journey glad,
No flowers to smile at me along the road,
No tender care to lighten half my load.

"I must go on," I said; and then without one word
You turned, and passed away far out of sight,
Back to the garden laughing in the sun,
And I to shadows gray and brooding night.
But I pressed onward still—alone; alone,
While night winds made a weird mysterious moan.
Strange, strange, I thought, that you should leave me so,
With never a kind word to break the pain!

And as the darkness gathered o'er my head,
My dream had vanished, and the vision fled!

And yet, I think, it left upon my heart
A lesson I was dull and slow to read—
So far, no farther, has your life a part,
In which mine blends, and meets perhaps your need;
Why should I feel it hard when by-and-by
We may rejoice together—you and I?

Patience and faith and resolute strong will
To tread the path which God's hand maketh plain:
And see, along the way a sparkling rill
Breaks forth like singing to my soul again,
And rugged thorns are blossoming to flowers!
The light shines forth, and sorrow's cloud is gone.
That grey cathedral with its stately towers,
That garden with the sunshine in its bowers,
May shadow forth another to be won,
Where in the house not made with hands beyond the sky,
We may be glad together—you and I!

R. H.

September, 187—.

LADY ALICE'S STORY.

“If we could but hear all that people say of us when we are supposed to be out of hearing—all their careless comments, and detailed reports of our affairs, I believe it would cure us of over-anxiety about the exposure of our private affairs to the public, by showing us how vain it is to aim at keeping ourselves out of the reach of observation: that is but an ostrich-like business of hiding one's head in the sand.”—SARA COLERIDGE.

LADY ALICE.

TULSE HILL,
All Saints Day.

I HAVE not been well, and in the quiet and retirement of my own pretty sitting-room I must now try to write a sad story, which has clouded my bright life somewhat of late, though, I thank God, the very nearest and dearest of earthly ties is still close and firm. That was my first thought when the story of sin and sorrow was unfolded before me. Will it grieve Oliffe? will it bring any cloud between us? And since I have felt that he is ever the same to me—kind, tender, and generous—half the burden has been removed. As I said, I see in the last few pages written here, Oliffe went for a week's shooting to the Bironvilles' early in September, the girls returned from the Willoughbys', and Cousin Mary came to pay me a promised visit.

I felt so happy on the morning of the 7th of September, and went down into Kingsholme to ask Mrs. Boddington if she would help me to organise a concert to raise some money for the sick children's wing at the hospital.

In the afternoon I drove with Cousin Mary, and I felt so pleased in her pleasure at seeing me so

happily settled; and as I stepped out of the carriage and went into the wide hall, a sweet sense of home came over me. Cousin Mary laid her dear old hand in mine, and, as we turned for a moment to look at the lovely view lying before us in the soft breeze of the September evening, she said:

"How pleased your dear mother would be to know that you have so sweet a home."

"Yes," I said; "and I often wish my happiness might have brightened my father's last days; but it was not to be."

Then my thoughts went back to all those sad five years, and the pain which we suffered by the sin of poor Gerald, and, by contrast, the present seemed *too* bright.

As I was going upstairs, Jones came to me with a card, saying:

"This gentleman has been here an hour, your ladyship, and is waiting to see you."

"Mr. Murray!" I thought; "it can't be the Mr. Murray who was here in the summer; he is in the Engadine with Mr. Boddington. Mr. Murray!"

Questioning thus, I turned back towards the drawing-room door and went in, expecting to see a stranger. The first glimpse, however, of a tall figure, pacing to and fro before the large bay-window at the end of the room, was enough to tell me that it was no stranger I had come to meet.

"I am sorry my husband is away," I said, as I advanced to take his outstretched hand. Then, as I saw that his face was sad and troubled, I went

on: "I hope nothing is wrong with Mr. Boddington. I hope——"

"Lady Alice," Mr. Murray said, "I left Charles Boddington quite well at Zermatt, and returned hastily, as I wanted to consult you on a matter in which we have a common interest."

"Consult me!" I exclaimed, and my face must have betrayed that I was frightened, for Mr. Murray went on:

"The thing of which I must speak to you is very painful, but it is of the past, and I trust will in no way affect your present happiness, except indeed that I know you will feel sorry for the sorrow of others. Shall we be interrupted here?" he said, as the afternoon tea was brought in, and the footman went to the windows to draw up the blinds.

I knew Cousin Mary and the girls might be coming into the drawing-room, so I said we would go to Oliffe's study, but first I poured out tea for Mr. Murray and myself, and I saw how eagerly he took it. He had been travelling for two days and nights, and came straight to Tulse Hill, and was rather tired and exhausted, he said. Indeed he looked so, and it was with a dread of what I might hear from him, which I cannot express, that I led the way to Oliffe's study, where I was so strangely conscious of Sarah's eyes fixed upon me. That great picture of my husband's first wife, sitting enthroned in velvet and lace, has always an unaccountable fascination for me. I do not want to see it, and yet I am never in the room ten minutes but I find my-

self spell-bound by the wide-open, searching eyes, as I meet their fixed gaze on me, again and again. That day I almost felt as if Sarah were looking down upon me with an air of superiority and pity, while the tale was told.

Mr. Murray passed over all the painful details so gently; he was most kind throughout, and left only the impression of his own chivalrous unselfishness and goodness upon my mind. He told me he was the son of a Scotch clergyman, named Campbell, who died when he was a mere boy, and he took upon himself the care of his mother and sister, who were left with very slender means.

He went up to Oxford from Edinburgh, and made, as he modestly said, a pretty fair beginning. Soon after, a distant relation died and left him a small fortune and his name. His mother and sister lived at Ardloch, in Bute, and there he always spent the vacations. It was a favourite resort for reading-parties and fishing, and much frequented in the summer months. One summer, ten years ago, a man came there for fishing, calling himself Edgar Lewis. Mr. Murray found him very clever and pleasant, and able to talk on any subject; he made himself very soon at home at the little cottage at Ardloch, and took poor Violet Campbell's heart by storm. Mr. Murray seems always to have felt a certain distrust, for which he had no apparent reason; it was only the instinct which makes a true and honourable man shrink from one who is false. This Edgar Lewis, who was really my poor brother Gerald, represented himself as a man with no ties

of any kind, and alone in the world, and this evidently gave him a claim on the simple, affectionate heart which clung to him to the last.

The marriage was very suddenly determined on, and Mr. Murray hurried up from Oxford to be present; and then Violet went away with her husband in a yacht, for a cruise to the Orkney and Shetland Isles.

From time to time my poor brother seems to have been absent, and once for some months; but his young wife's faith in him never seemed to falter.

At last an urgent appeal was made to Mr. Murray to help him in a great difficulty, and advance some money to save him from ruin. His sister's entreaties and his mother's distress moved him, and he lent the money on false security—out of his small fortune it was a large sum—and of course lost it. After this, things went on smoothly for a few months, and then Violet was startled by a sudden and imperative order to get ready to start with her husband to America. She never hesitated for one moment, though in a state which made her most unfit to travel; she prepared for her journey, and did all she could to cheer her mother. It would seem that Gerald was always kind to her, and gentle in his manner to her mother. I know how winning he could be, and I know how attractive he was when in his better moods.

All things were ready for the start, when two rough men appeared at Ardlochie, and inquired for a person calling himself Edgar Lewis. One of the

men declared that he had married and deserted his daughter, and that he was an Earl's son, and he would have the law on him unless he made full compensation.

Mr. Murray was telegraphed for, and arrived to find that Gerald had escaped, and poor Violet lay between life and death, struck down with the force of the most terrible blow that can fall on the head of any woman. Two months later her boy was born, and as soon as she was able to travel, her kind and generous brother took her and her child, with his mother, to Australia, giving up all his own brilliant prospects, and thus saving his sister from the speculations and remarks of the outside world, and generously protecting her as much as possible from the consequences of my unhappy brother's sin. He died, as we knew, at Montreal, though little but the bare fact ever reached us; and although we were too well aware of his disgrace, we had no suspicion that he had left a gentle loving girl to fight the hard battle of life, with a blight resting upon her and her boy, which could never be removed.

Mrs. Campbell died shortly after her arrival in Sydney; she was too old to bear the uprooting from her quiet life and the burden of her daughter's sorrow. Violet, Mr. Murray said, lived for the boy, and was gentle and uncomplaining, though changed from a bright, happy girl to a sad, careworn woman. She urged Mr. Murray to return to England again and again, but he could never make up his mind to leave her.

She died about two years ago, and a kind friend, who was greatly attached to her, took the boy and cared for him as her own; but now her health has failed, and troubles of many kinds, heavy pecuniary losses, and the uncertainty of her life, has made her write to Mr. Murray to beg him to take immediate steps for the child's return to his care.

He received the letter whilst on his tour with Mr. Boddington, and felt compelled to consult me as to the future of the child before he wrote to Mrs. Smith, in answer to her request; for, as he truly said, neither he nor I could desert the boy. I felt I could promise nothing without consulting Oliffe. It is very important that the boy—little Edgar—should know nothing of the past. Mr. Murray describes him as a very handsome, sensitive boy, with dark blue eyes and a fine outline of face. Indeed, he says, the likeness to his father would strike any one who had ever known him; he is scarcely eight years old, but very forward for his age. Mr. Murray held the position of mathematical tutor in a newly-formed college at Sydney, and supported his sister entirely by his exertions.

He scarcely referred to the loss of his money, and I felt so humbled and sad as I looked on his fine, noble face, and thought of the wrong he had suffered by my brother's fault. "I must be responsible for the boy," I said; "whether I can give him a home here must depend on my husband's will. Your burden has been far too heavy already, and I must do all I can to lighten it."

"Edgar must be sent to a preparatory school," Mr. Murray said. "I have to begin life again, and I am only filling this place at Bilbury till I can settle my plans. I must work," he said, and added cheerfully, "there is some work left in me yet. Since I have been with Boddington my spirit has revived, and I have to thank him for re-kindling my energy, while intercourse with other friends since my return has done something for me also."

Mr. Murray would not stay to dinner. We arranged that he should come on the following evening and see Oliffe, and that on his return, which I expected would be about luncheon-time, I would tell him of his visit to me. I confess that I dreaded it, and wondered what my husband would say, and what he would wish me to do. I know so well how much he values the good opinion of the world, and I felt so bitterly that this poor boy was a sort of living and perpetual reminder of my brother's sin. Yet how unjust it would be to leave Mr. Murray all the care and responsibility; surely he has suffered enough already. When he was gone that evening I sat in the study, quite forgetting that the dressing-bell had rung, and when Kelly came to look for me, she saw at once something was wrong.

It ended in my going up to my room too utterly exhausted to come down again that evening, and I was glad to go early to bed; and there Bertha came to see me.

"Mamma, what did Mr. Murray want?" was the very natural question; "has he said anything to vex you? How angry papa will be!"

"Mr. Murray had some business to talk over with me," I said, "and he is coming again to-morrow to see your father. You love me, I know, Bertha, so I ask you not to question me any more, only you may be quite sure Mr. Murray is the best and kindest of men."

"Oh! I dare say," said Bertha; "but Geoffrey says he is very much overrated. He is quite of the old school of thought, and——"

"School of thought," I repeated, laughing in spite of myself. How easy it is to take up terms and phrases and have no idea of their meaning. Poor Bertha! She would be a very apt pupil, and Geoffrey might lead her as he chose very easily.

Cousin Mary came next, with a tender "Good-night," and lastly Sarah.

"Are you ill, mamma?" she asked. "It is very odd of Mr. Murray to shut himself up with you for two hours in papa's study. I am sure papa would not like it."

"Sarah," I said coldly, "I am very tired, and I must say 'good-night.'"

"Oh, very well," was the still colder response. "I am sure I don't want to disturb you;" and then the not very gentle shutting of the door told me that Sarah was gone.

It seems hopeless to win her; and it is always a mystery to me when I see anyone making herself so persistently disagreeable, as Sarah does. If there is an inappropriate thing to say, she says it; and the apparently entire absence of tenderness or sym-

pathy makes her a most trying element in everyday life.

Oliffe did not return the next day; but Mr. Murray appeared in the afternoon, as he had said he should. I did not ask him to stay to dinner, but walked down the shrubbery path with him, and let him out at the small gate. We stood there for a minute talking, and I saw a Miss Sambourne and her niece pass by. It struck me then that Mr. Murray's sudden appearance in Kingsholme might excite remark amongst hungry gossips. For Kingsholme is but a little world, and trifling things vibrate through it with electric power.

I was feverishly anxious for Oliffe's return, and when at last the sound of his horse's feet was heard, I went out to meet him. It was our first separation, and how thankful I was to feel his arms round me and to rest my head upon his shoulder.

"What is it, dearest?" he asked.

"Only that I am so glad you are come back," I answered; "and I have so much to tell you."

"Come into the study, then," he said.

And there again, with Sarah's picture presiding over us, I repeated my tale of sorrow and sin. I knew well that to be connected with any dishonour would be pain to my husband. It *was* pain; I saw it by the expression of his face.

"You have told no one?" he said, at last.

"No one."

"Do the Boddingtons know?"

"I should think Mr. Boddington may have known

all along; he and Mr. Murray are friends of so many years."

"Well, I think," Oliffe said, "this story must be carefully concealed. No good can come of proclaiming it. I do not wish the girls to know it, or my mother or sisters."

"But when the boy comes here? For I feel, dearest," I urged, "that the whole weight of his education and maintenance must not be suffered to fall on Mr. Murray; he has paid such a heavy penalty already, that I cannot bear to think of it."

"Yes, that is true; but we must not be hasty in our decision. When the boy arrives it will be time enough to consider then, he cannot be here, I suppose, till April or May. But I will see Murray to-morrow, and we will talk it over."

"Oliffe," I said, "you cannot think how hard I feel it to bring any trouble to you."

Ah! what did he not say to me then of all our happiness together, of the brightness I had brought into his life! Such words from any husband to any wife would be sweet; but from a man like Oliffe they are doubly valuable. The assurance of his love was like the sun shining through the cloud which Mr. Murray's tidings cast over me.

I have not been very strong since that day, and feel the burden of anything like a secret, or a mystery. I cannot help it, though I know it is foolish, but if Mr. Murray's name is incidentally mentioned, I feel the colour rise in my cheeks; and

the other day, when Rhoda was here, I was very much hurt and vexed.

Mrs. Boddington and Rhoda came up to luncheon, to discuss the programme of the concert. Rhoda has been less affectionate to me of late. There never has been real sympathy between us, but I have always hoped that she would get to love me in time. Her sharp speeches and asperities have increased, while in the summer she was so much more gentle and loving that Oliffe noticed it.

While we were settling the songs and the parts to be taken by different people, Mrs. Boddington said:

"Mr. Murray has a very good tenor voice. I am sure he will take a part in one of the songs. I know he can sing 'Memory' very well. If we have the concert about the 19th, he will be able to be present."

"Yes," I said, "that is a very good thought; and perhaps you can ask him to sing a solo. I will write to him, and tell him our tenor needs. We shall do very well for sopranos and basses; but tenors are a difficulty. I will write to Mr. Murray to-day."

Rhoda looked up with a sudden flash in her eyes, and said:

"I should think that Margaret had better ask the question, as she has known Mr. Murray so much longer than we have."

"But I am not the real promoter of the concert, Rhoda," was Mrs. Boddington's answer; "the request will come better from Lady Alice."

So the matter apparently ended; but the next day, when I was alone with Rhoda, she suddenly said:

"Alice, how long have you known Mr. Murray?"

I felt sure that I looked conscious and uncomfortable, but I answered as quietly as I could:

"Only since my marriage."

"Oh! I should have supposed you were very old and intimate friends, as you saw so much of him when he was here in September."

Had Rhoda been tender and kind, I should have so gladly confided in her a little; but her manner was such, that I felt repelled and ill at ease.

"Of course," Rhoda said, "it is no concern of mine; but it is a pity that the girls should speak of it, and write about it. Janet mentioned it to me in a letter the other day."

"Mentioned what?" I asked; "I don't understand you."

"She said that Bertha had told Agnes, that Mr. Murray had been shut up for hours with you in Oliffe's study, and——"

"Please stop, Rhoda," I said; "this family gossip which goes on in letters is quite new to me. I must decline to listen to it, or enter into it."

"You can't hate it more than I do," said Rhoda; "but, as these girls do indulge in it to a great extent, I think you ought to check it."

The tone was not pleasant; I felt angry, and answered coldly:

"I am the best judge of that."

After this there was a long silence, painfully long. Rhoda bent over the list of performers and music she was making out for Mrs. Boddington, and neither of us seemed inclined to speak. I could not help looking every now and then at Rhoda, as she sat at the writing-table, her head is such a beautiful shape, and so well-placed on her shoulders. I wonder often if she has had a love-story, as most women have who come to her age; she would have been a loyal enthusiastic wife if she had married the right man, but how miserable if she had fallen into the hands of the wrong one. As I was thinking this and a great deal more, she rose in her abrupt, quick way, and said:

"I have finished the list, and will take it down to Margaret; can I do anything else for you in Kingsholme?"

"No, thank you," I said; and as Rhoda was putting on her hat, I saw her face was flushed, and I could almost think tears were on her long dark lashes.

"Good-bye," she said, coming up to me and kissing me on the forehead. Then, with a great effort, she continued, "I always hate mysteries and secrets, and it irritates me to hear that there can be anything mysterious about a man whom I thought as straightforward and open as the day. I am very stupid, I dare say, that is all."

Yes, it was all; she was gone like an arrow from a bow, or, more properly, like a stone from a sling, for Rhoda has nothing airy or light in her movements.

A thought struck me then, and has recurred since, that she liked Mr. Murray very much, and I dare say their friendship grew and strengthened at Malvern. I shall be glad when the poor little boy comes, and when there is no longer any secrecy. Oliffe is, however, inclined to think that it will never be well to let Edgar's story be known; he thinks it would do the boy harm, and perpetuate the disgrace of his father without doing any good to him. Perhaps Oliffe is right, still I know how vain it is to hide troubles of this sort from the world, where everything is canvassed and discussed. Long before Gerald's sins were openly proclaimed, and when my dear father used to think he bore his trouble about secretly, it was known well enough in our London circle and in our own neighbourhood in Ireland. I look forward to the boy's arrival with some fear, and begin to think it will be better for him to be kept at school entirely. But why should I be too anxious as to the future? God ordereth my way, and how good He has been to me hitherto! I can scarcely realise that when the early summer-flowers are making the world glad, there may be for me a new and untried joy—the greatest a woman can know—the joy that makes her remember no more the trouble.

December 27.—The concert is now fixed for the 4th of January, and Tulse Hill will be full to overflowing. I am much stronger, and have got through the fatigue of Christmas far better than I expected, for, with all its pleasures, Christmas is a tiring time. Presents for every one to be thought of, near

and far; letters to write, and cards to send. Geoffrey and Hilda Wynne are here already, the Bironvilles and Mr. and Mrs. Willoughby and their daughter come on the 3rd, on which day we are to have a grand rehearsal.

I have had some very liberal donations for the hospital, one from my cousin, Lord Clanmarina, which surprised me. He says he shall probably be in our parts next year, and shall look us up. He is unmarried, a man over forty, older than poor Gerald by some years.

I sent off large hampers to the mine, and little presents for Cherry's scholars. Her letters to me are so simple and natural; that I do long to see her again and do what I can to help her. I must try and persuade Oliffe to take me to Stonycroft when all this bustle is over. He wants to see the working of the new shaft, and to arrange with Mr. Thompson about the additional cottages which must be built. We are to have the plans very soon, and perhaps we may get a small church built there in time; that is one of my bright visions for the future, which I earnestly pray I may live to see realised.

RHODA'S STORY.

. . . “For women’s knees are weak,
And their feet are little stedfast,
And their hands for comfort seek;
On the earth the blossom falleth,
When the branch is dried with day,
And the vine to the elm-bough clingeth,
When men smite the roots away.”

MORRIS.

RHODA.

TUDOR VILLA,
January 4, 1871.

THE concert is just over—the room was filled both in the afternoon and evening. People say it was a great success, and Lady Alice Heathcote's enterprise is in every one's mouth. Tulse Hill has been full, and mother and I have had our share of guests. I have just seen Janet's Agnes brush out her long hair before the fire, and finding her disinclined for conversation I did not attempt any. Then there is her brother Frank in one of our upper chambers, and he is thundering over my head with a heavy boyish tread as I write. If it goes on I shall have to stop him, for he may disturb mother. No need for me to mount the stairs, for I hear Mona's sharp tap at the door above, and her voice remonstrating.

Mona came into my room just as I wrote those words, and stirring my fire and putting on fresh coals, said:

“Writing and writing! Why you ought to be in bed, as I have just been telling Master Frank. I should have thought after the concert you'd be tired out. Let me brush your hair a bit, will you?”

I knew what this meant, "Let me talk a bit with you"—so I complied, and was obliged to acknowledge the soothing power of Mona's hand as she drew the brush through my hair.

"It is thick enough," Mona remarked, "though it is rather grey. You might make a deal more of it. Look at Miss Thornbury's, now. You and she were little things together, trotting along the Abbey Walk. Can't I now see you, and the dear mistress as proud as she could be of you—her first girl! Ah! do you know I don't think the mistress is quite the thing; did you see her when you came home?"

"Of course," I answered, "I always go to her room; I don't think she is ill."

"I did not say ill," said Mona, "but, well, I see a change. All this evening she has been tearing up old letters by herself, and she called me in to take them away and burn them. She showed me Mr. Oliffe's first curl tied up with blue ribbon," and here Mona's voice trembled. "It makes me feel I am growing a very old woman," she said.

But, sharp as was the pain Mona's words caused, I would not ask any more about mother. I could not bring myself face to face with the idea of losing her. I know it must come, and may come any day; but now more than ever I say to myself, I could not live without her. Mona drifted off into other subjects, Agnes' untidy ways in her room and about her dress, wanting half a dozen maids to look after her. Then about Frank, and how bad it was for him to smoke at his age, and then Mona went

on to Tulse Hill, and Lady Alice. How every one had a good word for her; that Mrs. Hall said she could not help loving her; and though she is pretty near worked to death with all the company she does not care, for Lady Alice is always so considerate.

“Working her to death?” I said.

“Ah, well! that’s only Mrs. Hall’s way of speaking. Her ladyship has ordered in plenty of help in the kitchen and house.”

So Mona talked till at last my hair was plaited into one tail, and then, after a few touches to the fire and the room, and an injunction to go to bed, as if I were a little girl again, she finally departed.

I was writing about the concert when Mona interrupted me. Margaret Boddington’s playing was the best part, and she has so much grace and self-possession. She played Mendelssohn’s Concerto in G perfectly, and then a divine adagio movement of Beethoven’s. Of course the audience were not as rapturous in their applause of this, as of Lady Bironville’s song. She is a tall fair woman, got up in the very extreme of fashion, and with an air of being somebody, which commends itself always to the populace. I heard remarks near me, “What a lovely dress!” “That is a magnificent diamond;” and so on. Little Miss Meredith sang very nicely with Miss Willoughby, and “Memory” went well. I have seen nothing of Mr. Murray, and I dare say my manner has repelled him. But of all the strange experiences of life it is the strangest to feel suddenly a subtle change in our relations

with a friend. I felt so entirely at ease with Mr. Murray, without any nonsense such as Dora Thornbury suggests. I did like him so much. I looked upon him as nearer my ideal of manhood than any one I had ever known, and then there came a cloud. He comes here secretly, and it has destroyed my faith in him. The other evening I met him at the Boddington's, and I have seen him once at Tulse Hill at one of the dinner-parties. He did not talk much, and I scarcely exchanged a dozen words with him. He has passed out of my life as he came in, unexpectedly, and what right have I to complain? I have a good many sheets to copy for Charlie to-morrow, and I am proud to be able to help his work. He is always so good to me, and both he and Margaret have been most especially so since we all came home last autumn.

January 7.—I have been at home with a horrible attack of face-ache and a most relentless cold—minor evils, but they have an unfortunate effect on my temper. I am thrown all behindhand with Charles Boddington's work; and here are Agnes and Frank still hanging about. Agnes is so wofully without occupation, and has now but one idea, which is, how often she can get to Tulse Hill and sit at the feet of Geoffrey Wynne.

Sarah came in to-day, and dawdled away at least two hours. Sarah has always the trick of saying the least agreeable things, she invariably finds out tender places—not with the humane desire of healing and soothing, but, it would seem, with less charitable intentions. She began:

"Papa thinks Grandmamma looks very poorly; he wonders you don't see it, Aunt Rhoda. He said he should ask Dr. Greene to call to-morrow."

"Your grandmamma has had a cold but not nearly as bad as mine," was my reply. "It has been through the house."

"Yes, but Grannie seems so weak," Sarah persisted. "You are never weak, Aunt Rhoda; mamma says you are the strongest person she ever knew."

"Your conversation ought to be bracketed with quotation-marks, Sarah. Can't you make an original remark, or narrate some amusing incident?"

"Nothing particularly amusing," Sarah said. "Bertie and Agnes both make themselves ridiculous about Geoffrey Wynne, and Hilda is almost as bad about Mr. Murray. He comes up every day, and mamma is very fond of him, for they are always having confabulations. I can tolerate the folly of girls like Agnes and Bertie, but when middle-aged people fall in love it is rather too absurd!"

"You should take care what you say, Sarah; you might make great mischief."

"Well," with a prolonged yawn, "I see nothing in Mr. Murray to make a fuss about. He is very dull, and very seldom says a sharp thing; the great topic of conversation with mamma is the coal-mine, and a very stupid one it is!"

Mother now came down from the afternoon rest which she takes in her own room, and Agnes and Frank returned from Tulse Hill in the pony-carriage, which took Sarah back.

"Aunt Alice has asked us to spend the whole day at Tulse Hill to-morrow," Agnes said. "We are to go a long walk to Chelford, and lunch at the Harrison's if it is fine. May we go, Aunt Rhoda?"

"Yes, indeed," I said, delighted at the idea. "I am sure you will enjoy it."

Mother and I had one of our pleasantest evenings together, and she seemed so bright and well that I had no room to think over the doleful view Oliffe took of her appearance, till, just as we were parting for the night, mother said:

"It is a comfort to me to think, dear, that when I go, you will have this house to live in; there will be no sudden wrench and change for you. I have been speaking to Oliffe about it."

"Why should we talk of that?" I said. "I may go first."

"Ah, Rhoda, the young *may* die, but the old *must*."

"Mother," I said, "tell me, do you feel ill—is there anything wrong?"

She gave me her sweetest smile—ah! and how sweet that can be, only her children know.

"Not ill, dear, but, you know, at seventy-six there must be a gradual falling down of the old tabernacle—the dissolving of the house; but we have another to look forward to. I hope—I hope, Rhoda, my dear child, that you may be kept steadfast in the faith. I sometimes think these are days when the old safe guides are exchanged for others less trustworthy."

Mother's words have come back to me again and again. I think she is right, and I feel I needed a caution.

January 8.—I think if ever I felt dull in my life it was this afternoon. I do not bear pain well, I know, and this constant neuralgia or toothache makes me nervous and irritable. Mother was upstairs as usual, and the rain was beating against the windows, while the wind moaned dolefully. If I had been well, I should have buttoned on my waterproof and gone to look after the people in St. Michael's Terrace. Margaret and the children have all colds, and who but the most robust people would turn out on an afternoon such as this has been? I tried to read, but not even Browning's last poem could take away the consciousness of pain. Knitting was worse; so I resigned myself to repose, if I could get it, in mother's deep, comfortable chair, and at last I fell into a light, dreamy half-consciousness, and started to hear Mona's voice:

"Mr. Murray, Miss Heathcote!"

Mona saw I was asleep, and spoke in a strong, decided voice.

I dragged myself from the depths of mother's chair, and said:

"I have been asleep, glad to escape from the misery of face-ache for ten minutes."

"I am sorry you are not well," Mr. Murray said. "I am going to leave Kingsholme to-morrow, and I wished to call on you and Mrs. Heathcote before I went. I hope your mother is pretty well."

How much there is in a tone of voice! When

last I was alone with Mr. Murray there was no stiffness or constraint between us, and now I felt a sort of intangible something which threw me back and made me cold and formal.

"Mother has not been very well the last few weeks," I said. "She is resting now, but I dare say she will be here presently. Are you going back to Bilbury?" I asked.

"Not to-morrow; I have to get through some business in Oxford and London first."

"You must get very tired of teaching boys, I should think," I said, for the sake of saying something.

"A year is a short probation," was the reply—"scarcely time to get tired. It will soon be a year since I first came to Kingsholme."

"You have been here several times since," I said; and now I did not speak without intention.

"Yes, it is quite familiar to me now," was the quiet answer; "and I have found friends here old and new," he added. "What are you reading?"

"I was trying to read 'Balaustion's Adventure,' but I am not up to it. Mr. Boddington sent it to me this morning."

Mr. Murray took up the book, and turned over the pages, reading here and there two or three lines, more to himself than to me. I looked for the lines when he was gone. Two struck me as applicable to himself:

"But how carve way in the life that lies before
If bent on groaning ever on the past."

And the last couplet in the book:

"It all came of this play that gained no prize!

Why crown whom Zeus has crowned in soul before?"

"Ah," he said, putting down the book, "we all think too much of the visible crowning: we are not content to work without some sign of approval. We all like what we call recognition."

I do not know how it was, but my stiffness and doubt gradually vanished. Long did we talk in the dusk, the firelight casting fantastic shadows on the wall, and bringing Mr. Murray's fine head out in a soft outline.

Mona brought in the tea, and I gave Mr. Murray cup after cup, till he said at last that he was rivaling Dr. Johnson.

He rose to bid me good-bye about five o'clock, and then said:

"I have scarcely seen you during this visit to Kingsholme. I am glad I came to-day; shall I tell you why I did not come before? I was not sure whether you would care to see me. I felt as if I had left a friend at Malvern last August, and had lost her."

"It was a mistake," I replied, "and only proves how dense you are."

"No," he said, "I am not dense where I am really interested in solving a problem. Why have you treated me like an acquaintance of yesterday this time, tell me?"

The question was so direct, and the tone so firm and authoritative, that I met his honesty with candour.

"I thought it odd that you should come to Tulse

Hill in September, and wish to keep your visit secret, and——”

“Ah,” he said, “is that it? Well, I have as yet no explanation to give you.”

“I want no explanation,” I said. “Pray—pray do not think——”

“I am of so much importance to you; very well; good-bye.”

He took my hand in his with a sudden earnest pressure, and just then mother came down.

Mr. Murray sprang to meet her, drew her hand through his arm, and led her to her chair.

“We thought you had deserted us, Mr. Murray,” mother said; “did we not, Rhoda? How is your face, my dear? She has been suffering terribly the last two or three days, and has been quite ill,” she continued, addressing Mr. Murray. “Dear Rhoda, do light the candles on the chimneypiece: it is so dark.”

I obeyed, and when the pale light of the wax candles revealed Mr. Murray, I saw he was looking earnestly at me.

“Don’t run away directly I come,” said mother. “Sit down again, Mr. Murray, and tell us about the concert, and if dear Alice is pleased with the result.”

Mr. Murray did as mother wished, and sat talking on for another hour.

When he was gone, mother said:

“I do think he is one of the pleasantest men I ever saw, and he seems to have cured your neuralgia, Rhoda.”

Then mother and I spent a quiet happy evening together. She got out some old letters, which I read to her: several of Oliffe's when he was a boy—so well written and well spelt; and two or three of poor Francis's, all up-hill in the writing, and so confused as to style and spelling. The letters are very like the two men, as I know them now; the life of one so prosperous, and, if I may use the word, so complete; the other's so scrambling and chaotic—the question of how to get on at all, and make two ends meet, the grand question, and apparently not to be satisfactorily answered this year. For there was a long pathetic letter from Janet this morning, expatiating on Christmas bills, and drawing vivid pictures of the miseries of small incomes, etc., etc. Mother was so much moved thereby that she sent me to Dawson's with Agnes, and ordered me to get there for her a black velvet, which the child coveted, and have it fashionably made by the dressmaker who looks after the personal appearance of Sarah and Bertha.

This sent off Agnes to Tulse Hill with a light heart, and when she returned with Frank about ten o'clock, I expected to see her all smiles and brightness. Poor little Agnes! I cannot forget her sad, pathetic eyes, and rosy, quivering lips, nor the disconsolate answer to mother's question:

"Have you had a pleasant day, dear, at Tulse Hill? It has been a very wet afternoon."

"Yes, thank you, grandmamma. Good-night."

And then Frank's rough boyish and discourteous addition came:

"Agnes has been fearfully cross all day, for that stupid prig, Geoffrey Wynne, is engaged to Bertha."

Agnes was gone now, and Frank continued:

"A stupid, conceited fellow he is, drawling out his nonsense, and expecting every one to listen. I can't imagine what Agnes or Bertha can see in him. Bertha is the most awfully jolly girl I know, and she will repent this some day."

With which terrible denunciation Master Frank also departed.

"Bertha engaged! What does he mean?" mother said.

"What he says, I suppose. I have seen it coming for some time, and I think Alice has encouraged it."

"Well, I suppose we shall hear about it from Oliffe to-morrow," mother said.

And so we also betook ourselves to bed.

I was in my dressing-gown, sitting by the fire meditating, when a gentle tap at my door was heard, and Agnes came in, all her beautiful golden hair floating over her shoulders, and her pretty little face pale and distressed.

"Aunt Rhoda, I want to go home to-morrow, please. I don't wish to stay. May I go? I don't wish ever to go to Tulse Hill again; at least not——"

I saw it all, poor child, and I was so sorry for her—sorrier far than I should have been a year ago.

"Sit down here before the fire," I said, pointing to a low stool on the hearthrug.

And then Agnes obeyed, and laid her head on my knee.

I put my arm round her, and I felt her poor little shoulders heaving with sobs.

"Aunt Rhoda," she said at last, "you won't tell any one? I am so foolish; please say you won't. I know I am not half as clever as Bertha, nor handsome, nor rich, as she will be. I hope she will be happy, and love him as he deserves to be loved. Then she is rich, will be very rich, and we are so poor!" She added this more bitterly than I cared to hear, at nineteen.

"I was afraid how it would be, Agnes, last summer. I knew that Mr. Wynne was just the man to enjoy the admiration of a girl, feel flattered by it."

"Oh! Aunt Rhoda, as if he could; he is so great and so far above us."

It was no use, I saw. The hero was no less her hero because he had chosen Bertha before her. She will come out of it soon, and will grow more fit to be a good man's wife at the right time. This is not the right time, and I am sure Geoffrey is not the right man. Agnes would have merged her individuality in him and had no will or idea of her own. Bertha, on the contrary, will give him some trouble, and when the first glamour is past will assert herself; she will dare to admire other people's performances as well as his, and venture to think there is a world beyond the little circle of kindred spirits in which Geoffrey Wynne moves, all repeating each other, speaking in the same tone, enunciating

ing the same doctrines, and criticising every one who is outside their charmed circle mercilessly and superciliously. And yet, as Charlie Boddington said the other day, "Wynne and his leaders account themselves the most liberal fellows on the face of the earth." Can self-delusion further go? I think at last I sent little Agnes away comforted. She kissed me as she had never kissed me before, and said:

"You will help me to go away soon, if not to-morrow, Aunt Rhoda, and you will not tell any one, not mamma—oh! not mamma. It is all my own fault, I have been so foolish, and I don't want to be laughed at. Sarah—" and a great sob nearly choked her voice—"Sarah does say such stinging things."

"We none of us mind Sarah," I replied. "She has been an invalid all her life, or rather has thought herself an invalid, and therefore privileged to amuse herself by taking a pleasure in saying disagreeable things."

"Yes, indeed," said Agnes warmly, "she was talking of you to-day in the most shameful way, saying that Mr. Murray was in love with Hilda Wynne, and that you were so disappointed."

Oh! this family failing of retailing conversation, and I know I am often guilty myself. But I would not let little Agnes see how this shaft struck home.

When alone, however, I tried to be honest with myself, and I, who pride myself on my honesty with others, find this hard work. I came to this

conclusion and write it here that I may see it, and feel ashamed.

Sarah is right, if Mr. Murray does love Hilda Wynne I should be disappointed in him, not——that will do. I am sleepy, and look forward to a good night after the tossing and grumbling of the three last, during which I have never been free from pain, for a moment.

January 21.—My birthday: a year to-day since I recorded here the interesting fact that I was thirty-seven. Years are all short now but this last has gone like a shadow. Mother is stronger, and for that I thank God. Bertha's engagement to Geoffrey Wynne prospers; what will not love do, especially in the first fervour of youth? Bertha comes humbly to me for help in her German and Italian, and to Charlie Boddington for all manner of tough books, and she reads, with how much understanding is not my concern; and has altered her straggling pointed handwriting into very small close characters leaning much to the left,—in fact she is her master's obedient pupil. She, the high-spirited gay girl, who chattered all day and frittered her time away in nothings and gossip, she is now the studious Bertha, given to trot out her little acquirements and superficial knowledge to her elders with an air of superiority, and to pity any one who cannot see with Geoffrey Wynne's eyes. Poor little Agnes makes her moan sometimes to me in her letters, and speaks of dark and dreary days, and of how long and weary life looks to her. Home troubles press on her: the children have had the

measles, Frank is very troublesome and will not settle to any work, and Janet, poor Janet, is overdone and anxious. I know what those words mean, and can well imagine Agnes has had a trying time of it. There seems nothing to look forward to, she says, and she cannot help thinking how different her lot is to some girls of her age, who have everything they wish for. Poor child! I can be sorry for her, but she has the precious gift of youth, her life lies before her, and not as she now thinks a weary sad path, but to be brightened hereafter, I dare say, in a way she little dreams of now.

Tulse Hill, Easter Tuesday.—Mother and I are staying here for Easter. Oliffe arranged it all, and sent down the carriage with hot bottles and rugs to convey mother and me and Mona to our destination. I would just as soon have stopped at home, but it pleases mother to be with Oliffe, and she admires his house and his flowers and his pictures without reservation. An unexpected turn to the course of events arose yesterday when a telegram came from Mr. Thompson, the viewer of the Sarah Mine, to request Oliffe would meet the engineer and builder there as soon as convenient.

Alice's face brightened, and she said:

"Will you take me? I do so want to see that the plans for the new cottages are properly carried out."

"I am afraid it will be too much fatigue for you, dearest," was Oliffe's reply; but I felt it was a

settled thing, nevertheless. Is there any thing that Oliffe could refuse Alice?

They both set off yesterday afternoon in the carriage with Kelly, and are to stay two or three days, I believe. Alice told me that she thought it probable Geoffrey Wynne might appear any day, as the Easter holidays were sure to bring him, and she said she could leave the girls quite happily with me. It is a comfort to be able to put your responsibilities on other people's shoulders with a smile. What with Sarah's crotchets and Bertha's love-making I should very much prefer not being at Tulse Hill in charge during the absence of the master and mistress.

This morning at breakfast, Bertha having seized upon the envelope with the Oxford post-mark, in the small yet legible hand, exclaimed:

"He is coming to-day, Aunt Rhoda."

"*He*," said Sarah scornfully. "Do you mean the Prince of Wales?"

"No," said Bertha, kindling, "I don't. I mean one of the men, though, whom George Macdonald calls Princes."

"Well, we will do our best to receive his Royal Highness with due honour," I said, "so I had better depart, and see Mrs. Hall at once."

"How different every one is to mamma," Bertha exclaimed. "I do not think she was ever disagreeable in her life; she *is* perfect."

"A princess at least," was Sarah's parting observation as we left the room together.

Such a glorious April day it has been; and if I

enjoy nothing else, I enjoy my room, opening from mother's, and looking over the town, lying as I write fair and quiet in the moonlight. We have all separated for the night, Geoffrey Wynne with the rest. I think I hear steps on the terrace below, though surely that is the distant chime of the Abbey church clock striking twelve.

Tulse Hill, May Day.—So far I wrote that night, and threw down my pen as the great door bell rang gently, as if the person who was ringing was afraid of disturbing the household. Nevertheless, the peal sounded through the house, as all noises do at night, with double the power of daylight. My heart beat fast, and opening my window I looked down on to the terrace. Just as I did so the bell rang a second time, and Charlie Boddington's voice said:

"Rhoda, is that you?"

"Yes."

"Come down."

"What is wrong?"

"Come down, and I will tell you."

By this time the girls' maid, who slept in our wing of the house, was roused, and coming to my door, said:

"Oh, Miss Heathcote, who can this be at this time of night? Shall I call James?"

"Hush," I answered, gently closing mother's door. "Do not wake any one."

"But if it should be thieves, Miss Heathcote?"

"Thieves don't ring bells, Mary. It is Mr. Boddington."

We were on the way downstairs now, and with the maid's help I drew back the heavy bolts of the door, and stood face to face with Charlie Boddington.

"Rhoda, I have had a telegram from Thompson, the viewer of the Sarah Mine. There has been a giving way of the pillars in the old mine, and Mr. Heathcote was underground when it happened."

"Oliffe! Oh, what shall we do?"

"Excavation is going on, and no doubt the prisoners will soon be set free. There are sixteen people altogether in the mine. Mr. Thompson says that Lady Alice wishes for you."

"For *me*!"

"Yes; and indeed either you or some one else must start at once. Imagine poor Lady Alice's distress, and how much she must want sympathy."

"Of course I must go," I said; "but there is mother; anxiety about Oliffe will kill her, Charlie."

"It is better to disturb no one now," Charlie said. And we agreed that Mary should tell Mona, who was with us at Tulse Hill, what had happened in the morning, and that she should explain my absence to mother, and that while I went to prepare for my expedition, Charlie should write a few words to Geoffrey Wynne, to beg him to tell Sarah and Bertha of the accident at the mine, promising that they should have a telegram as early as possible the next day. Mary came up with me, and took down one of my candles and some paper and a pen and ink to Charlie, while I wrote a few words to mother. How my heart ached for her! Oliffe,

her joy and pride—the staff of her old age, as she often called him, to be in danger! It was hard to realise; and when I had made my hasty preparations, and gone out into the beautiful April night with Charlie Boddington, I did not feel at all as if I were awake, but as if I were walking in a dream. The air was crisp and keen, innumerable stars throbbed above, and the waning Easter moon was rising high in the heavens. How kind Charlie Boddington was, how truly he proved himself a friend in need! He knows so much on every subject, and put before me so clearly what was most probably the cause of the accident; how what are called “creeps,” that is, a pushing up of the floor in mines which have been long worked, often occasions a fall of the pillars or supports, and thus the passages are blocked up with the masses of coal till a way can be made to reach those who are shut in.

“It is a far more hopeful state of things than when the water bursts into a mine, or there is an explosion from foul air taking fire,” Charlie said; “in fact, you must cheer up, Rhoda, and when we get into the carriage you must try to go to sleep.”

“We are going to drive, then?”

“That is all we can do,” Charlie said. “There is no train to Stonycroft after 10.40.”

The carriage had been thoughtfully ordered at the Bell Inn by Charlie before he came up to Tulse Hill, and we found it at the door of St. Michael's Terrace waiting for us. Margaret stood in the hall, all dressed and ready to come with us.

"Friends in need," I exclaimed, as she gave me one of her quiet expressive kisses, and followed me into the carriage.

Charlie settled himself in the opposite corner, and we drove in the calm, quiet night along the deserted roads for the most part silently, and with a weight at our hearts, and anxious questionings of what we should find when at last our destination was reached.

We stopped once on the road at a small village inn to rest and bait the horses, and here two rough-looking men were standing talking by the door.

"They do say there's sixteen of 'em buried alive in the Sarah," said one of the men. "But, lor! what's the fifteen poor souls to the grand Squire? There wouldn't be this hullabaloo if he were above ground. The rest might die like rats in a hole!"

"Sending off now for another of the big engineering folk, just as if any fool could not tell 'em they must bore and pick, and pick and bore, till they come on the passage that is blocked, till they get at them, dead or alive."

I felt a strange fascination in listening to those rough, unfeeling voices, and kept my head out of the window, eagerly catching at every word.

"Who can they be?" I asked Charlie Boddington. "Speak to them, and find out what they know."

That is not much, I expect; but Charlie got out of the carriage, and drew a little apart with the two men and the landlord of the inn, who came out to see if, as he expressed it, the gentry in the carriage wanted any refreshment. Charlie was absent about

five minutes, and when he came back into the carriage, he told us what he had learned. The accident at the Sarah Mine had caused a great sensation in the neighbourhood. Several "overmen" and the "consulting viewer," with some dozen of experienced miners, are in the mine with Oliffe. They had gone to visit it to ascertain if the working should be continued in the old mine, or the whole of the operations transferred to the newly-sunk shaft. The accident had happened in the oldest part of the mine, that is, in the part that had been worked the longest, and it is conjectured that in experimenting as to the thickness of the strata, yet left, some of the pillars, already weakened by a creep, had given way! All is pure conjecture, as no voice can be heard, the alarm being first given about three o'clock in the afternoon, when a party of hewers heard the sound as of a heavy crack to their left, and on going towards the passage which led in that direction, found a "block-up," and gave the alarm above ground.

"Those two men were only colliers, and I think their information was second-hand," Charlie said. "They are on their way to Culmemouth now to inquire about some wagons which have been sent there with coal."

After this he relapsed into silence, and the dull, regular beat of the horses' feet upon the road was the only sound which for some miles broke the stillness.

A night ever to be remembered; and as I retrace every hour, nay, every minute of it, the suspense

and feeling of utter helplessness to do anything in this great emergency sweeps over me again. I found myself repeating, as we went on at an even, steady pace, words which shaped themselves into a sort of rhythm as they kept time with the horses' feet:

"Vain, vain is the help of man—vain, vain."

The first faint pallor of the dawn was streaking the eastern sky when we drove through the deserted streets of Stonycroft, and then on in the direction of the two tall chimneys of the shafts, which stood up like two grim sentinels, dim and ghost-like. The dull red blaze of the heaps of coal gave a strange lurid light as we passed along, and our coachman slackened his pace as we went by the rows of miners' cottages.

Every one was on the alert. Figures came to the doors as the carriage-wheels sounded, and occasionally the cry of a child or the shrill voice of a woman reached our ears.

By the shafts themselves there were black masses of people congregated, and here we stopped. As we got out of the carriage a man advanced to meet us, and said a few words to Charlie, who, turning to me, said:

"This way, Rhoda. Lady Alice is at the mouth of the old shaft."

Can I ever forget Alice as I saw her seated on one of the cross-beams of a lift, her head leaning back against the shoulder of a woman who knelt by her, with one arm thrown round her; and who, like Alice, seemed to have her gaze fastened on the

mouth of the pit, whence dark figures were seen passing and repassing, and from which the dull sound of hammers and picks could be heard in the stillness which reigned; for the hush of suspense and anxiety fell over the people. Now and then a deep sob or a cry broke from the little group nearest the place where we stood, but for the most part the miners' wives and children were quiet. The daylight was strengthening every minute, and the great host of stars above us were one by one growing paler; and soon Venus and the moon were left to lose themselves in the glory of the rising sun.

A feeling of awe crept over me, like nothing I had ever experienced before, and Alice's white fixed gaze as I saw it then will never pass from my memory. I touched her cold hand twice before she spoke to me, and the dark-eyed girl who knelt by her looked quickly up at me, as if to question my right to speak to Alice, or in any way encroach on her right to protect her, and said:

"Have you any one down there—any one you love?"

"My brother," I answered.

"Ah! but not your husband—your husband—that never spoke a cross word to you in your life, and that you had scoffed at because he was too good for you?"

"Hush, Cherry, hush!"

It was the first time Alice had spoken. Now she turned her head towards me:

"Rhoda, is that you? Kiss me."

Such a gentle, sad voice; it went to my heart.

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In that moment I think the fountain of my love was unsealed for my sister-in-law; in that moment I knew her, recognised her—brave, sweet, and tender, and, as we were to prove, with a power of endurance which has been seldom equalled.

Charlie Boddington walked about, making inquiries, speaking to the people, getting all the news that was brought up from time to time by those who came up the shaft. Mr. Thompson was below, superintending the operations there, and so were all the principal overmen and the best hewers. The great engineer was expected by an early train, and fresh comers from Stonycroft were constantly arriving.

Although in my heart was one thought, one anxiety prominent and distinct, one fear which grew ever more and more oppressive, still I felt myself taking in all the details of the scene before me as I sat by Alice and held her hand in mine. Out beyond the moor, where we had been so happy a year before, the rosy lines across the clear sky told that the sun was rising. Alice looked in that direction also, and I heard her say:

“‘Till the day break and the shadows flee away,’ he cannot see the sun rise down there; but he will be here to-morrow.”

“To-morrow, my lady, to-morrow!” Cherry said; “they’ll be here to-day; soon now, soon now.” But the quivering lip and eager, restless expression in Cherry’s dark eyes seemed to belie her words.

How beautiful the spring morning was; how the glorious shining of the sun illuminated the dark and dusky region where we were gathered. How it

shone on the pallid, anxious faces of the groups nearest us, those who had an anxiety like mine—women whose sons and brothers, fathers and husbands, were shut out from its blessed light.

One old woman sat crouching close to the very mouth of the shaft. She had no tears to shed—age and sorrow had dried them long ago—but she moaned as she rocked herself to and fro, and I heard a voice near me say, “Poor soul! she has lost all her boys but this one who went down with the Squire; and proud enough she was that he should be chosen to go.”

Then there was a young woman with children clustering round her; another with an infant at her breast, and three fair-haired boys standing by her side. She cried bitterly, and I heard her say, “There is no hope—no hope. Were not twelve of them buried alive in the Duchess a year ago last Michaelmas?”

The others were mostly silent, only an eager question or exclamation as the figures of two or three miners jumped out of the lift, and made but short answers to the inquiries. Indeed, there was nothing to tell. We could hear the dull sound of the pick and the axe below; we saw a fresh relay of miners with tools disappear, but we could only sit, and watch and wait.

Margaret called me aside after we had been sitting there for two hours or more, and told me that I must do my best to get Alice to go to Mr. Thompson's house and lie down. Kelly had been entreating her to do what she could, and had lighted

a fire, and got some coffee ready in the little bedroom there. Kelly now joined us, and said:

"It will be her ladyship's death if she sits there much longer. Just fancy what Mr. Heathcote would say if he could see her; Mrs. Boddington, pray try and persuade her ladyship to come." I noticed even then that Kelly did not appeal to me. She scarcely seemed to notice my presence, and addressed herself to Margaret. "Since three o'clock yesterday afternoon has she sat there—it will break my heart," Kelly went on, melting into broken sobs. "I wish the nasty mine was at the bottom of the sea; it is pretty near that already; but I wish we had never come nigh the dreadful hole. It ain't the place for gentry, as I told my poor dear mistress last summer. Look at my hands," said Kelly; "I have washed 'em twenty times, but the water isn't to say water; it's got smuts in it. But something must be done, ma'am, about her ladyship."

Charles Boddington now came to say that he was going down the mine with the engineer, and that he would return as quickly as possible and tell us his report. Margaret turned very pale, and said:

"Will it do any good, Charlie?"

"I can satisfy myself and you too," he said, "by going down. There is no danger, Madge! how can there be?"

"The bad air," Margaret exclaimed, anxiously, "and you know you are not strong."

"Nonsense," Charlie replied; "I shall be back in two hours at the longest. I have had some breakfast with Mr. Thompson; and I hope you and

Rhoda will persuade poor Lady Alice to come into the house; it is so terrible to see her sitting there, with that white face, watching and waiting; and it is not as if it were likely to be over soon; it may be days yet."

Days! How should we bear it? and my thoughts went to mother now, bearing too the heavy weight of suspense which seemed to crush me, as I remembered all that was involved in the possible loss of Oliffe.

"Let me stay here, dear Rhoda," Alice said, beseechingly; "I could not rest anywhere else."

Then Margaret bent over her, and whispered something which seemed to have an effect.

"Yes, I will come, Cherry: will you not rest too?"

"I'll go when you go, my lady," said Cherry, passionately; "don't let any one part us two."

"No, Cherry; we will watch together and pray together to the end. Help me to get up; I am so stiff."

Cherry was on her feet at once, and her strong arms were thrown round Alice only just in time, for she was all but fainting, and her head fell heavily on my shoulder as I supported her on the other side. There was a movement in the little group of watchers as we passed on.

"Poor thing!" I heard a woman say, "it's hard for her." Then another less sympathising voice said, "It's fine, Cherry Penrose making that fuss. She was a sight of trouble to her old man. I've no sort of patience with her."

We laid poor Alice on the bed, and for a long time she was scarcely conscious of anything that was passing. A deadly faintness overpowered her, and one of the Stonycroft doctors whom we called in said that she must be prevented from going to the shaft again to watch.

The doctor spoke, as every one spoke, of days of suspense; how should we bear it? Indeed, I know not how we did bear it; the slow sad hours went on; night came, morning broke, day succeeded day, and still from the pit's mouth no news—only the dull, heavy sound of the axe and pick—only the constant succession of miners in their strange garb, ascending and descending, passing and repassing, with tools and implements, and stolid blackened faces.

Alice was too weak to resume her place at the shaft's mouth; but she had a chair taken close to the window of the room she occupied, and there she sat, hour after hour, Cherry kneeling by her, and both looking always down the straight narrow road which led from Mr. Thompson's house to the pit.

Charlie telegraphed every few hours to Tulse Hill, and was thoughtful and kind beyond all praise. I walked restlessly about with Margaret, returning to Alice from time to time, to kiss her white forehead, and to express my sympathy as best I could.

"His mother!" she said, now and then, "his mother! The poor girls! Let them know everything."

"Yes," I said, "we telegraph often, and Geoffrey

Wynne sends us a reply. They have written too," I told her, on the third day; "do you wish to see the letters?"

She held out her hand for them—Sarah's, Bertha's. Then there were a few trembling lines in mother's hand, addressed to Alice, and enclosed in her note to me. The first tears I saw Alice shed fell on that letter.

"Oh! his mother, his mother," she murmured; "it cannot be that she will lose him."

"Go and see her, Rhoda. Tell her I think God will give him back to us."

I had been longing to get to mother, if only for a few hours, and it was settled that Margaret and I should return together to Kingsholme, and leave Alice with Kelly and Charlie. Margaret was glad to have the chance of seeing her children, whom she had left so hurriedly, and I was thankful to have her with me on my sad journey. We went by the railway from Stonycroft, and I took a fly from the station at Kingsholme to Tulse Hill, dropping Margaret at St. Michael's Terrace on the way.

All the glorious weather was over; rain fell heavily, in a quiet, even downpour, as the slow cab-horse climbed the hill, and drew the heavy old station fly, through the wide open iron gates of the entrance. Truly, fear and trembling took hold on me as I crossed the familiar hall towards the door of the morning-room.

It was empty. Only an old Scotch terrier, growing blind and infirm, rose from the hearthrug to greet me. How often had I seen Oliffe stoop down

to pat poor Dandy's head! Oliffe, the master of this beautiful house, where was he? Alive or dead, we knew not. Suffering the pangs of starvation, perhaps, or perhaps already where they hunger no more, neither thirst any more.

I wondered as I stood there that no one came; but at last, as I was turning to go and find the girls, a quick, rapid step was heard, and, to my surprise, Dora Thornbury came tripping in.

"We heard the fly-wheels," she exclaimed, "but no one has told us who it was. I am in the girls' sitting-room with Sarah. I came up on Wednesday, and they seemed to like to keep me. Oh, my dear! my poor dear Rhoda! Is there any news?"

"None," I said; "where is my mother?"

"In her room, with Mona. She is very calm—very calm. Sarah is the worst; she has fits of screaming hysterics, and it is so dreadful. Bertha has, of course, *her* comforter; they are in the study together now. And then, to add to all the perplexity, Mr. Murray drove up last night, with a child."

"A child!" I exclaimed. "What child?"

"Ah, my dear Rhoda, that is more than I know. His own, perhaps. I can't tell. He had written, it seems, to Lady Alice; but, of course, the letter was not opened, and so we were quite unprepared."

"Where is he now?" I asked.

"Gone down into the town. The child is in Mrs. Hall's charge. A most extraordinary child! very handsome, and very excitable. Mrs. Hall looks after him, for she seems to understand children."

"Oh! that Dora would let me alone," I said, inwardly, for her arms were still round me, and she interspersed all her story with, "You poor dear!" and many kisses—all meant so well, but all positive torture to me.

At last I broke away, and went to my mother. She was sitting quietly on the sofa in her room, her large-printed Bible open by her side on a small table, her spectacles lying on the page. Mona was standing by her with a cup of beef-tea, which she had been coaxing her to take.

"There, I am glad you are come," Mona said; but mother was speechless. Her eyes sought mine; she looked for hope in them, but found none. The bitter sorrow of old age is so grievous—no tears, no moan, no passionate expression; but the blow falls, as it did on mother, with a crushing force, and she sank beneath its weight.

"Sit down and tell me all," she said, at last. "God's Hand is heavy upon me, Rhoda."

"We must not give up hope yet," I said. "This is only the fourth day; and the excavations are carried on without ceasing. Many instances are reported of people being a week or more in a mine, and——"

"But they must starve, Rhoda; think of the lingering death in the darkness! Or they may have been crushed by the first fall—or hurt—or——"

A terrible picture. I had had the like before me continually, not daring to put it into words.

"Darling mother," I said, "Alice sent you her very best love; and I was to tell you that she thinks

of you, and prays for you; and she asked me to repeat the words to you that are always in her mind: 'God is our Hope and Strength; a very present help in trouble.' Alice says she finds Him all He has promised; and she thinks He will give Oliffe back to us."

"Dear Alice! my poor, dear Alice! May God bless her!" was mother's reply.

I sat with her for a long time; it was a rest to be near her, though my heart told me she would never long survive the terrible loss of her son, if indeed it came.

The sound of wheels was heard on the terrace below; and in a few minutes the door opened, and poor Francis came hurriedly in. He could not stay away any longer, he said; and the poor fellow whose heart was ever a most tender one, knelt down by mother's side, and sobbed like a child.

He became calmer soon, and I saw it was a comfort to mother to have him. She roused herself to ask Mona to see that he had a good luncheon; and I left them together while I went to find the girls.

It was just what might have been expected. People who are selfish in their pleasures are doubly selfish in their sorrows. Sarah gave no one any rest; she was always declaring she must go to Stonycroft, that she must go down the mine; why was she not allowed to go? and cries and hysterical screaming alternated with fits of moody irritability, which poor Dora Thornbury bore more meekly than I could have done. There is something touching

after all in Dora's devotion; for she has had but scanty returns for all the affection she has lavished on this family. The girls have been neglectful and often discourteous to her, while I feel painfully conscious of my own shortcomings and intolerance of her little weaknesses.

How great sorrows drive little troubles into a corner! how the shadow of a great anxiety blots out everything but itself! and we wonder how we could have grumbled when free from *this* particular trouble, which, outweighing all others, makes them as dust in the balance! I felt this with pangs of self-reproach, as I remembered how I had worried myself about Mr. Murray, and rebelled against the doubts which I felt about him. Now, if only my brother could be restored to us, what would anything else matter in comparison?

Bertha came rushing towards me when I opened the study-door, and flung her arms around me.

"Oh! Aunt Rhoda!" and then came the eager questions, to which I had no answers, and Geoffrey Wynne's slow inquiries in his deliberate voice, which seemed to quiet Bertha. They were seated with books and papers before them.

"Geoffrey thought I should be better for trying to read," Bertha gasped between her sobs: "And I am sure he is right. Oh! Aunt Rhoda! these awful days of waiting! How is mamma?"

"She is very calm now," I said; "but the strain is dreadful for her."

And now, as I was speaking, the door was

thrown open, and a child came in, with Mrs. Hall in hot pursuit.

"I will—I say I will find Uncle David. You shan't keep me from him, you horrid old woman!" Then the high-pitched, but musical voice ceased for a moment, and a pair of gentian-coloured eyes, fringed with dark lashes, were lifted to mine—"Who are you? I have not seen you before!"

"Come back directly, you naughty child!" said Mrs. Hall wrathfully. "With the house full of sorrow, and trouble enough to kill us all, we did not want the like of you. Come back, I say," and Mrs. Hall took hold of the boy's arm with no very tender touch.

"What an *enfant terrible!*" said Geoffrey Wynne, surveying the child with his look of supreme indifference. "I agree with Mrs. Hall that he is not a desirable inmate—now or at any time."

"No indeed," said Bertha, "it is most extraordinary that Mr. Murray should bring him here at all. He says it is mamma's wish, and that papa approved it; but it is very odd."

And now the conflict between Mrs. Hall and the boy grew fiercer, a housemaid had just appeared to assist in capturing the rebel, when, as if by magic, the boy's passion was subdued, as a firm, decided voice was heard pronouncing his name. Only one word, "Edgar!" but it was enough.

The lovely eyes ceased to flash, for they grew dim with tears, the beautiful, curved mouth quivered, and the little clenched fists hung listless

at his sides. The boy stood quietly before Mr. Murray, awaiting his sentence.

"Go away with Mrs. Hall, and do as you are told."

The child was departing sorrowfully, when I pleaded for him.

"He wanted you," I said. "He feels lonely and strange, I think; may he not stay with us?"

"Thank you," Mr. Murray said, "for your kind thought of the boy; but he must learn to control himself; he is nearly eight years old. I will send him away with Mrs. Hall if she will be so good as to take him; and he shall come to me afterwards."

The child departed; the gong sounded for luncheon, and we all went into the dining-room.

Poor Francis came down, and Dora also from Sarah's room. How strange it seemed to sit quietly there as usual at the table with its pretty appointments, the servants waiting on us, handing us dishes which we could not taste—some of us at least, for Geoffrey and Dora Thornbury eat a very good dinner. How strange it was to believe that the master of all before us, the collector of the rare blue china arranged in oak cabinets, the ruling spirit of the whole, was lost to us, buried out of sight; the hope that he would be restored to us growing ever fainter and fainter.

Just as the little square room where Alice kept watch all those days, with its cabinet-sized photograph of Mr. Thompson's father and mother adorning the walls, in company with engravings of Stephenson and Brunel; just as the straggling

pattern of the paper, and the confused arabesques of the Kidderminster carpet, will ever be distinctly before me when I recall this time; so will that luncheon table at Tulse Hill be always impressed on my memory, when these days are remembered, with all their pain and suspense, becoming every hour more feverish and unbearable.

Dora's inconsequent remarks, her perpetual exclamations of wonder and sympathy, were a sore trial of my patience; but I saw it relieved poor Bertha to speak of what was pressing upon us all. And Francis renewed his old friendship with Dora, who called him Frank, and blushed with delight when he told her she did not look a day older than his own Agnes.

"Ah! but my back is to the light," Dora said, with her little conscious laugh, then, checking herself, "I wonder how we can laugh to-day."

I felt so restless that it was a positive relief to find myself on the way to Stonycroft again, and when I had committed mother to Francis' care I felt she was in safe hands. How the rain beat upon the windows of the brougham as I drove down into Kingsholme, stopping to take up Margaret. She was ready, with a small portmanteau, in the hall, and I thought this looked like a preparation for some days; so I said, as she seated herself by my side:

"Surely this can't go on much longer."

"I have had a telegram from Charlie," she replied. "Lady Alice is very ill, and there is an

opening made at last into the gallery. They can hear voices, and know that there is still life."

"Still life!" I repeated. "Is that all you know?"

"Yes, dear, all I know certainly."

Our journey was for the most part silent, and nothing is more congenial to me than the sympathy of silence. Once I broke it by saying:

"Mr. Murray is at Tulse Hill with a child—a little boy."

"Yes," Margaret answered; "he has been at our house, and left a note for me."

"Who is this child?" I asked. "It is so odd that he should bring him to Tulse Hill."

"Lady Alice is interested in him," Margaret replied, "that is all."

"Why should there be any mystery about the child?" I asked.

"If there is a mystery it will be all cleared up one day," Margaret answered; and I knew I must resign myself to uncertainty in this, as in greater troubles; questions were useless.

We reached the "Sarah" about seven o'clock, and I saw that there were a great many more people gathered near the shafts than on previous days. Several carriages and horses were waiting about, for many of the leading people in the neighbourhood, who knew Oliffe personally or by name, had come to inquire or offer assistance. As Margaret and I left the carriage which had been sent to meet us at Stonycroft, we saw Lord Bironville, who was kind and sympathetic, and tried to be cheerful.

"They will be all here soon, I hope," Lord Bironville said. "The opening is large now, and when I was down below they spoke of another two hours seeing them all liberated. "But you know," he said, "there is trouble there," nodding in the direction of Mr. Thompson's house. "Poor Lady Alice has been prematurely confined," Lord Bironville went on; "the child is living—a boy. Poor Heathcote——"

He stopped, afraid of betraying what I know was in his heart—the fear that Oliffe's boy would never have a father's care.

"Where is my husband?" Margaret asked.

"Oh, he is underground. He is of great use, too; and he is so full of suggestions. He is a clever fellow, Mrs. Boddington," Lord Bironville said; "he was always fond of propounding obvious truths."

What a night followed in that ugly little red-brick house! The rain came down with a continuous rush; and, seen through the watery veil, the coal-fires, and lanthorns, and lamps looked dim and blurred. The poor little heir of Tulse Hill made a fight for his life, and was said to be doing well. Not so his dear mother. The doctors were with her, and Cherry never left her, quick, they said, to follow out all directions; forgetting her own trouble and suspense, she gave herself up to Alice. Kelly looked jealously on, but neither she nor any one else had the courage to separate these two women whose hearts were knitted together by a common sorrow.

I have thought since that it was in God's great

mercy that Alice lay that night insensible and unconscious of what was passing. She was spared the terrible scene at the pit's mouth, which no words of mine, written or spoken, can ever describe.

We had lighted a fire in a small bedroom, next to that where Alice lay, and here I sat with Kelly, who held the baby in her arms, while Margaret came in and out, occasionally changing places with Kelly, and always quiet and self-possessed. I was neither. I could not take the baby in my arms; I almost shuddered at him, poor little mortal! so small and puny, moving his feeble shrivelled fingers like birds' claws; while upon his old pinched little face that mysterious likeness to his father was seen, which is, I hear, so often noticed in new-born babies, and which disappears afterwards.

A cold grey dawn was struggling into the room, when we heard Charlie's step below. I went to the top of the stairs, and met him.

"Come now, Rhoda, at once; they are bringing them up the shaft—make haste!"

"Cherry must be told," Margaret said.

"Yes, and one of the doctors; there are several on the spot already, but all help will be needed. Ask if it is possible for Mr. Turner to leave Lady Alice."

I went into the room to inquire, and by the light of the two candles I saw Alice's pale, sunk face. Mr. Green held her hand in his, feeling her pulse, and Mr. Turner was holding a spoon to her lips. I whispered my question to Mr. Turner, but he shook his head. Cherry, who was kneeling by

the bed with her eyes fastened on Alice's face, caught the words, low as I spoke, and looked up. She rose with a sudden gesture, motioned to Margaret to take her place by Alice's side, and went quietly from the room.

I gave a last look at Alice, and could be thankful that she was unconscious of anything that was passing. I bent down to kiss her, and then Margaret wrapped a shawl round me, gave me my hat, and I went out in the chill damp morning.

The air was teeming with moisture, and the road to the shaft slippery with mud.

I clung to Charlie's arm, asking no questions, and almost dreading, if he spoke, that I should hear the worst.

As we reached the pit's mouth, a piercing cry rang through the heavy air. It came from the mother of the two fair-haired boys whose husband's body had just been brought up the shaft and laid upon the ground.

"Crushed by the fall of the pillar," I heard a voice say.

Another, and yet another, stiff, lifeless body was brought up, and I covered my face with my hands, for I was afraid to look.

At last I heard them say, "He is alive, this one," and then, with a wild cry, Cherry threw herself down by the prostrate figure, and exclaimed: "Nat, oh, my Nat! I'll love you better now than ever I did before. I'll never do nothing to vex you again. Nat! Nat!"

Then a slight shiver shook the miner's strongly-

knit frame, and I heard broken gasps and sighs, as Nat Penrose made a great effort to speak. At last he said: "Cherry, my girl, kiss me. I've been too hard on thee. Thou wert but a child, and I was a trifle hard on thee; but I pray the Lord to comfort thee. I am going, my dear, but don't thee fret. I am going to the dear Lord who has never forsaken me, and I'll soon be singing His praises."

"It will break my heart!" Cherry exclaimed, passionately. "Why don't the doctors do something for him?" she said, looking round her with a despairing cry.

"Hush, hush, Cherry!" poor Penrose said; "thou must try to be quiet. The Squire has been with me all these long dark days and nights; we shared our food, and we prayed together."

"Is he——" I began, as I draw near.

"Is Mr. Heathcote——"

But the poor man's eyes closed and voice failed him. I felt conscious that Charles Boddington had gone to meet the next burden borne from the pit's mouth, because he knew it was Oliffe. And so it proved.

I tried to go forward, and the crowd of eager, anxious people gave way to let me pass.

"The Squire, yes, it's the Squire," I heard on all sides, "and they say he is dead."

"Dead!" My legs refused to support me, and I fell forward, utterly overcome, and fainted, for the first time in my life.

When I struggled back to consciousness I found

myself on the sofa in Mr. Thompson's sitting-room, and Kelly was with me.

That dreadful sensation of returning life after fainting was a new experience to me, and I felt as if I would far rather sink back into forgetfulness. Kelly held some water to my lips, and said:

"There, you are coming round now, Miss Heathcote. Don't go and cry, it will only make you weaker."

To use a common expression, "there was no love lost between me and Kelly," and I only sobbed the more when she told me to stop.

"They said he was dead!" I exclaimed; "they said he was dead!"

"Well, no; thank God, it is not quite so bad as that," Kelly said. "Mr. Heathcote is alive, but very weak from starvation. Some of the poor creatures were crushed, and died right off at once. Two or three of them were hurt, like Penrose, and the rest escaped with whole limbs; and, thank God, Mr. Heathcote is one."

"Where is he?" I asked.

"They have taken him into one of the houses the doctors got ready."

"Does Lady Alice know?"

"She knows nothing," said Kelly, bursting into tears. "They say her pulse is stronger, but she lies quite still, and when she opens her eyes, they have a far-away look in them, as if she were half in heaven already."

"Oh, bless her heart!" Helen went on, "she was a deal too good for us, and some that never knew

what she was, and had no eyes to see that she was as near perfect as any one ever was, will find it out too late. Come now, Miss Heathcote," Kelly went on, after levelling her well-deserved shaft at me, "come now, don't begin to cry again. We shall have you ill next, and to be sure it is dreadful work to have gentry cooped up in cabins of places like this when they are ill. You ought to have something. I will go and get you an egg beat up in wine. Don't stir, mind, till I come back; I won't be long; and mind you don't stir, or you'll go off again."

Kelly's caution was needless, for when I tried to raise my head from the hard, uneasy pillow, everything was whirling round, and I found I could not move. How was it that I was so useless, and could do nothing? I longed to go and see Oliffe, and here I was helpless and incapable. I closed my eyes again, and lay waiting. Kelly seemed a long time, and it was a relief when Charlie Boddington came in.

"Mr. Heathcote is coming round; and there is every reason to hope he will soon be all right. Poor Penrose is dying; they have moved him into his own house; and out of the sixteen souls only seven are saved. I could scarcely bear the scene," Charlie said. "It has just been what, if I had been asked, I should have said I would go a hundred miles in another direction to escape. This mystery of pain and death is awful, when one comes face to face with it. It is pathetic to see the grief of these poor people for their dead; and the girl they call Cherry, it is more than I can bear to see her."

Yes, this mystery of pain and death is, as Charlie said, awful. Scarcely less awful, I thought, is the mystery of life, as the wailing, feeble cry of the baby sounded through the thinly-built house from the room above, and I remembered how the spark had been kindled in that frail little body a few hours ago—the immortal, undying soul, as we say in our set conventional phrases, with but a dim glimmer of a majesty of the truth we put into words.

Kelly's dose revived me, and, with Charlie's help, I went out once more to see my brother. He was calm and collected, and held out his hand to me with a faint smile.

"Alice?" was his first word.

The doctor, who was standing by him, gave me a warning look, and I answered:

"She is better, we trust."

"Is she ill?" he struggled to say; and then, in his old decided, authoritative tone, "Tell me the truth, Rhoda."

The doctor now broke in; he was a Stonycroft doctor; and proud to have the honour of attending Oliffe; a self-important, but well-meaning man, with a fresh colour, and sandy hair retreating from his forehead.

"Her ladyship is doing well, we hope. Mr. Green, her own medical man, and Mr. Turner are in attendance. Her ladyship has honoured these parts by presenting you with a son and heir, sir, during her visit here."

"What?" was all poor Oliffe said. "Let me go to her."

"All in good time, sir," was Mr. Browne's answer, "all in good time. Her ladyship is to be kept very quiet, very quiet; and you can't quite walk even as far as Mr. Thompson's house yet. No, no, we must take our time, sir."

Oliffe was too weak to say any more, and I left him in the humble room, the contrast between it and his spacious, luxurious bedroom at Tulse Hill striking me forcibly.

I find I cannot write in detail of the days that followed. I, who had told Mr. Murray that visiting the sick and the poor was not my vocation, now found myself brought into close contact with sickness and sorrow, and pain and trouble. It was a time to be remembered all one's life. I have written this simply because the very expression on paper of these days is a relief—a safety-valve—for the feeling which must find some vent. The grand, important nurse, whom Lady Bironville sent from London, kept watch and ward over Alice after the second day, and added greatly to our difficulties. She and Kelly were at open warfare, and her complaints of the scanty accommodation were ceaseless.

On the evening of the third day, I was coming in from one of my rounds to the miner's cottages, when I saw a figure prostrate in the little hall. A mass of dark hair lay upon the shoulders, and I knew it was poor Cherry.

"Cherry," I said, calling her by name.

She raised her head, and said, with a look in her dark eyes like that of a wounded deer:

"He is dead—Nat is dead! There is a grand

lady here, who won't let me see my lady. Oh, will you let me go to her? for Nat is dead—dead!" I knelt down by the poor girl, and took her cold hands in mine.

"Poor child!" I said, "come into the sitting-room with me; don't kneel here. I can't let you see Lady Alice, for she is still very ill, and must be kept so quiet. You would not wish to hurt her?" I urged.

"Hurt her! I'd die for her! Oh, I wish I could die!"

I felt dumb in the presence of poor Cherry's grief, and could only stroke back her tangled hair and long to comfort her.

I had knelt thus by her for some minutes, when steps in the little garden made me look round, and Mr. Murray exclaimed:

"What is the matter—is anything wrong with you?"

"No, not with me; but it is all very dreadful here. This poor girl has lost her husband, and wants to see Alice, who has always been so kind to her."

"Kind!" Cherry repeated, "kind!—oh, she has been a deal more than kind! If it hadn't been for her, I might have been worse than I was. My Nat said I had been a deal better of late. If I had, it was her doing. Oh, sir," she said passionately, and springing up, "will you let me see my lady?"

"It is impossible," I said; and Mr. Murray replied:

"Let me take you home, my poor girl."

And then a rough but not unkindly voice was heard:

"Come along, Cherry Penrose. I'll bide with you to-night; it's lonesome for you to be alone with the dead. But, lor! you won't be the only one in that case in Stonycroft this night. There's Jane Tyler's boy, as we thought would have pulled through, is just gone. He was hurted inside; and there's his poor mother half crazy with grief. Come on Cherry; I'll bide with you, my dear."

Cherry suffered herself to be led away, and then Mr. Murray told me that mother was getting very restless, and anxious to have me back, and that my brother Francis thought I had better return to Tulse Hill, for he did not like to leave her till I was with her.

"Dr. Heathcote will come here then, as his mother wishes. She naturally wants to have his opinion of the invalids. Why," he continued, looking earnestly at me, "you will be ill next. Let me take you home by the last train—we shall catch it just; and it will give your mother a good night."

I was overwrought, and, I confess with shame, unfitted for the scene in which I found myself, so I said:

"Yes, I will come if Charlie Boddington thinks I ought."

"*I* think so," was the answer. "Go and get ready;" and I felt that the point was settled for me.

The presiding genius was now Mrs. Chandler, the grand nurse, who wanted to be waited on by

two maids at least, and who ruled with despotic sway over my sister-in-law.

With a sweeping curtsey she gave me leave just to look at Alice before I went away, but I was not allowed to talk.

"We shall do well now," Mrs. Chandler said, following me from the room, "if my orders are carried out; but, of course, we have every disadvantage in a cottage like this. I have nursed many members of the aristocracy in their own homes, but it was only to oblige Lady Bironville that I came here. It is not what I have ever been accustomed to. The Countess of——"

I hastily said good-bye, dreading the string of titles which would follow from Mrs. Chandler's lips, and went to look at my little nephew.

"There isn't much to see," Kelly wisely observed; "but what there is, is improving, bless it!"

I saw that Kelly's devotion to her mistress would show itself towards the little creature, and I left him in good hands.

Margaret was out with Charlie on missions of mercy, and I found her with the poor mother whose boy had just died. I took some messages to the children from her, and to nurse, and then I went finally to look at Oliffe. He seemed to me to make little progress, and was scarcely able to speak. His own servant, George, had come with the carriage to Stonycroft, and was now attending to his master.

At last I was off with Mr. Murray, and once more on the now familiar journey between Stonycroft and Tulse Hill.

My companion was silent, but encompassed me with all those sweet observances which are delightful to every woman, though some may be too proud to acknowledge it. I was covered warmly with a rug in the railway, and my shawl carefully wrapped round me when we got out at Kingsholme. Just a word now and then, but that was all; but I felt a sense of rest and protection, and, although I am thirty-eight, it was pleasant—more than pleasant.

The time since then has gone slowly. I have not left mother again, for she is shattered and feeble, and does not care to leave her room. Telegrams and frequent visits from the Boddingtons have kept us in constant communication with Stonycroft, and Oliffe has been here for one day, he will not leave Alice till she is able to be moved. The meeting with his children and mother, so greatly dreaded and yet so earnestly longed for, passed, as such things do pass, with far less excitement than we had feared. A graver, sadder-looking man than the Oliffe of old walked quietly into the hall one morning, and held his children in a long embrace. Then he looked round on the servants, and with a manner more natural and cordial than heretofore shook hands with Mrs. Hall and smiled, and looked his thanks to the others for their welcome.

"Is mother in the south room, Rhoda?" he asked of me.

"Yes," I said, as Mona came half-way down the stairs, and, unable to control herself, she sobbed out:

"At last it is you, Mr. Oliffe. Thank God!"

"Yes, Mona," he said, stooping to kiss the withered old face which had watched him in his cradle. "Yes, Mona, I am come back at last."

"And the dear lady will soon follow, and the baby. Oh, Mr. Oliffe!"

My brother feared to unman himself, and went on towards mother's room. I followed him and closed the door.

I cannot write of that meeting. I heard Oliffe say as he knelt by her chair:

"I have been face to face with death, mother—a terrible death. God grant that light may have sprung out of that darkness to me and to all of us."

After a few minutes the door was opened softly, and Oliffe said as he turned his head:

"Is that you, Bertha? Come in."

No, it was not Bertha; but a small boy, who came stealthily in, doubtful of his reception, and yet too curious and inquiring to resist the impulse which brought him there.

"Who is it?" Oliffe asked quickly; and before I could reply, the boy answered for himself:

"Edgar."

"Oh yes, I remember."

Then he turned to me.

"Murray is gone, I suppose?"

"Yes; he left us the day after I came back from the mine."

Then I took Edgar by the hand, and said:

"Come with me, Edgar."

"Is that the man," he asked when we were out in the corridor, "who has been shut up in the coal-

mine? I wish he would tell me about it; but he is so cross."

"Not cross, only you interrupted him. He has not seen his mother, you know, since that dreadful time he spent in the coal-mine."

"Is she his mother, that old woman?"

"Yes," I said, "and my mother too, you know, and I dearly love her."

"You little plague," said a querulous voice near us, Sarah's voice, "you are always pushing yourself in where you are not wanted. Go back to Mrs. Hall directly; you were told to stay in her room."

"Don't speak so crossly to the child, Sarah," I said.

"Oh, I know how fond you are of him," was Sarah's retort. "I suppose if Mr. Murray brought a dozen children here you would say they were all angels, Aunt Rhoda."

Edgar was ready with his retort too.

"*You* ain't an angel, anyhow; they are beautiful, lovely, good things, all in white, like my mamma is; and you are ugly and naughty."

"Be quiet, Edgar," I said, dragging him away towards Mrs. Hall's room, and promising to take him down to see the Boddingtons if he would be good.

"I want uncle David," he said. "He should not have gone away and left me here with these horrid people. I hate them every one."

Then, as he stopped in his vehement declaration of hostility, he said:

"I don't hate you."

This was some time ago, and since then Edgar and I have ratified our friendship. He talks much to me of his mother and grandmother, and of Aunt Smith, as he calls the friend with whom he has apparently been living latterly. And he talks to me of Uncle David, how he never whipped him but once, and that was when he told a lie.

"Not a great lie," the child said. "I was only in fun; but Uncle David said no lie, big or little, was fun to him, and so he thrashed me. Not very hard, and I would not cry. He says I am to go to school as soon as I am eight, and I wish I were eight. My birthday is in September—such a long time off."

Poor little Edgar!

May 30.—We are going home to-morrow, mother and I. Alice and the baby, with the irrepressible Mrs. Chandler, arrived two days ago. The baby is much improved since I last saw it, and doubtless fine feathers make a fine bird, for the pretty robes and flannel shawls, with white satin edges, improve the appearance of the small creature wonderfully. Alice has been at Lord Bironville's for the last fortnight, and there Mrs. Chandler has been in her glory. She is quite another person now, as she sweeps about the large rooms, and carries the bundle of white with the air of one of her oft-quoted countesses. The two girls take rather a faint interest in their baby brother, looking upon him as an unnecessary addition; but there is one devoted worshipper at his shrine, who hovers about the nursery door and Alice's room in the hope of

gaining admission, that he may look, and wonder, and speculate. It is not often that a boy of Edgar's age is so engrossed with a baby. No cross words from Kelly or Mrs. Chandler discourage him. Waking or sleeping the baby excites his keenest interest. I found him kneeling by the little pink-and-white bed this morning, examining the portion of red cheek which was uncovered by flannel with the greatest attention.

"Isn't it funny?" he said in a whisper louder than his ordinary voice. "Look how it crumples up its face, and keeps its eyes shut up. Oh! you funny, funny little thing. I *can't* believe you will ever be a boy."

"There! you have woke him up, that's what you have done," said Kelly. "I wish you would mind your own business. There is Mrs. Chandler with her ladyship, and the minute she comes back she'll turn you out."

"I'll go out with Rhoda, but no one will turn me out," said Edgar defiantly; his eyes flashing with that living light peculiar to his eyes, I think, and the colour on his face rising.

"I say, Miss Heathcote, do you know where he came from," Kelly said to me, jerking her head towards Edgar, "for there's a look in him which puzzles me; he is more like the family than anybody I ever saw not born at St. Lou. Why, he is like somebody I can't forget, sure he is, somebody I loved too with all his faults, and that makes me more patient with the boy; but lor', Miss Heathcote,

I hope he is not planted down here for good; he is not wanted."

"Hush, Kelly!" I interfered, for Edgar was listening intently to every word.

Then he broke out:

"I am not going to stay here where nobody wants me; if Uncle David does not come soon I'll run away."

And then he rushed impetuously from the room.

"You forget," I said to Kelly, "a boy of that age understands everything; you should be careful; he is very sensitive."

"Is he?" said Kelly shortly. "Well, I can't say I see it."

I went to see Edgar in bed the same evening to bid him good-night, and he drew from under his pillow a crumpled letter:

"Will you put a stamp on the corner of this and send it for me?" he asked. "I got Mrs. Hall to give me the paper, but she had not got an envelope, so will you write the direction? When you are gone away I must go; I won't stay here."

"Oh yes, Edgar, you will be a good boy, and you will soon love Lady Alice; she is sure to be kind to you."

"But those horrid people won't let me go near her. I like her, but not as well as you." The child suddenly sprang up, and throwing his arms around me, said, "I love you, and Uncle David likes you; he said so; he said you would be kind to me, and so you are."

"The boy has chosen me for a friend, and he

shall never repent it," I thought, as I smoothed back his tangled curls, and left him to his quiet sleep.

This evening I have had a long talk with Alice in her room. She goes up to bed early, and is very weak and unfit for exertion. Those terrible days at the Sarah Mine have less reality for her than I could have believed possible. She says it is more like a dreadful dream than anything else, and she really knows less of the details than any of us who were there. All the papers, too, with the account of the accident, the length of time the sixteen people were shut up from the light of heaven in their dreary prison, the inquest held upon the dead, with other particulars on which local newspapers delight to dwell, have never reached her. And I think her own illness and her baby's birth have blotted out the keen memory of those long hours when she sat motionless by the shaft, with Cherry kneeling at her side, and where I found her in the dawn of the spring morning with that wistful look in her eyes I can never forget.

Alice is very sweet and good to me. I have tried to say something about sorrow for having been often angular and disagreeable to her since she married; but she would not hear it, only saying that: "We had each of us much to learn about the other, and that she felt sure we shall be a mutual help now."

Then Alice began to speak of little Edgar, and told me that she had an especial interest in him, for he was the child of one she had known and loved in early youth. She said Mr. Murray had left

him with her for the present, and that after Midsummer he was to go to school.

"I am sure it will be best," I said; "the child is in everybody's way here. If I can persuade Mona to consent, I am sure mother will let me take care of him for a few weeks; and I should like it."

I saw Alice's face brightened.

"Oh! that would be very kind of you, Rhoda, but it would be too much to ask."

Oliffe came into the room at this moment, and Alice told him of my proposal. Oliffe caught at it eagerly, and I knew, whether Mona liked it or not, the thing was settled.

Tudor Villas, June 3.—We are settled at home again, and little Edgar occupies the room next mine where Nelly's small children sleep when they come. I have undertaken no sinecure, but I feel as if I were of use, and, more than that, the boy—troublesome, erratic, and even turbulent, as he sometimes is—repays me by perfect allegiance. I care no more about the mystery of his appearance, nor for the questions and gossip concerning him. I have a right of possession in the child, and I make him happy in this possession as well as myself. The blotted scrawl in printed characters, which must have cost the child much toil, taken from under his pillow that night at Tulse Hill, was to this effect:

"DEAR UNCLE DAVID,

"I want to run away. Nobody is kind to me except Rhoda, and I like no one but her and the Baby.

"YOUR LITTLE EDGAR."

I enclosed this in a note from myself, saying that Edgar was to pay me and mother a visit, and that I would try to make him happy. A brief note of thanks was the reply, and I answered it. Thus the matter stands, though I know no more about Edgar's link with Alice than I ever did.

Why should I want to know? It must be all right, and I rest secure in this belief.

LADY ALICE'S STORY.

But I could not sit within sound of the pit,
For it almost drove me mad,
For I counted, and counted, and counted
The blows of the pick and the gad.
And as easily could I reckon
My best life-blood by drops,
As measure *his* life by those random blows,
With the frequent pauses and stops,
When, with sullen sound, the treacherous ground
In the shaft-side fell away,
And the work was all to begin afresh,
And it's nearly a week to-day!
Look, tell me! Does any one come
From the pit? for my eyes are weak with tears;
A neighbour has promised to carry to me
The first news from the shaft that he hears.
Yet he said there was little hope for them now;
But I did not heed what he said,
For they cannot be dead, they cannot be dead,
Oh no, *he* cannot be dead!

THOMAS HOOD.

LADY ALICE.

TULSE HILL,
June 30, 1871.

IN the hush of this beautiful summer day, when through my open window comes the faint sound of bells in Kingsholme, as they ring out from the minster-towers in memory of our dear Queen's accession, I open my book, and will try to write the story of last spring for my boy's sake, who perhaps will read it one day, when in after years he thinks of Stonycroft as his birthplace. He is sleeping now in his pink-and-white bed, my little Oliffe St. Lou, and in the plump, healthy baby breathing so gently in his quiet sleep there is scarcely a trace left of the poor, puny little one, with the old, pinched face, which Oliffe brought to me in the small square room, where life and its needs and sorrows, its joys and happiness, came back to me.

I think I too urgently begged Oliffe to take me with him to Stonycroft last April. His better judgment was against it, but I was persistent, and gained my point. I notice always in my own life, and in the lives of others also, that when we press our own wishes in opposition to others—in plainer words, when we *will* have our own way, that way proves fuller of thorns than roses to us.

I felt so well and bright that Easter Monday evening at Stonycroft. Then the next day I went to Cherry's little school, and saw for myself her happiness and success in the work I had found for her. After this, Oliffe and I went over the plans for the cottages with Mr. Sparling, the architect; and the site of the school buildings and new church was discussed.

After luncheon, Oliffe was to go down the old shaft with a certain number of overmen and viewers, and the engineer, to inspect the works and to decide whether it was desirable to carry on operations there. I went to the pit's mouth with him, and saw him disguised in his ugly dress, and at last get into the lift. Just as he was passing from my sight, I heard him say "Good-bye." I answered back "Good-bye," and then turned away, shuddering. The descent into those dark, dreary regions had then an undefined terror for me.

An old woman was standing close to me, and I heard her groan.

"What is the matter?" I asked.

"Aye, nothing new, my lady; only, seems to me, I never can see my boy going down there without thinking of them I have lost, who have perished there. But, there! coal must be had, and there must be hands to work for it; and the Lord is with miners as well as with other folk. My son is a prime hand, he is; that's why Mr. Thomson chose him to go down with the Squire;" and the poor old woman dropped me a curtsey and shuffled away.

Ah, poor thing! she never saw her boy again in

health: he lingered for a little while, but received an internal injury which killed him.

I think from the moment when the great, sharp thrill of pain smote me, as they told me there was an accident in the mine, and that my husband was imprisoned there, I was scarcely alive to what was actually passing.

I was in Cherry Penrose's cottage, writing the names in some books, and looking at her little scholars' work, when Kelly's face at the door startled me.

"Is anything the matter, Kelly?" I asked; and before she could answer, Mr. Thompson came into the cottage.

He was very kind, but anxious to keep the worst from me. Perhaps it was as well. Even the very modified account of what had happened which Mr. Thompson gave me was sufficiently terrible.

I went at once to the pit's mouth, and there I sat till the next morning, when, by Rhoda's and Mrs. Boddington's entreaties, I went into Mr. Thompson's house.

Dear faithful Cherry never left me, and how that watch for life or death has bound us together!

After I had rested for a few hours on my bed, I sat by the window of my bedroom, straining my eyes to catch sight of any messenger from the pit who might bear tidings. Scarcely any one passed up or down that bit of straight road, for all interest was centred at the pit's mouth. I could not sleep or eat, or do anything but listen and wait. Familiar words repeated themselves again and again in my

mind—I think they were the whisper of the Great Comforter.

“God is our refuge and strength—a very present help in trouble.” I sent these words to Oliffe’s dear mother by Rhoda, when all others failed me: they seemed to come straight from God’s treasure-house. I can picture no desolation so great as to be without Him when flesh and heart fail. I can say that He was with me, and by His sweet mercy the floods did not overwhelm me utterly.

Three weary days and nights I passed thus, and then everything is more or less a blank. I was conscious, in some degree, of pain, which was lulled by chloroform, then of strange voices of doctors and attendants, and then, as in a dream, I heard the feeble wail of my child.

I remember trying to speak then, but every one seemed far away, and I felt as if I could not reach them. I was on the border-land between life and death—lying between two worlds—standing on the threshold of the higher and better life our Father has promised to His children.

I was confused and bewildered; and there was no hope that I should be spared to my husband, for some time after it was known that his precious life was saved.

That evening, when Oliffe stood by me with our child in his arms, was the first time that I had realised anything. It was one of the supreme moments of life, of which it is impossible to write—they are only *felt*, and words fail utterly.

My dear husband had a very trying time at

Stonycroft after this—the inquest on the bodies of the poor brave men who had perished in the mine, and their funerals.

Without an exception they all had behaved with the greatest heroism.

Oliffe has told me many things of those long, dark days, and of the patience with which those who had been hurt bore their pain. Foremost amongst these was Nat Penrose. He and my husband were close together, saved from being crushed by a huge mass of coal, which had not given way, and made a sort of circular compartment which hemmed them in. Nat had his wallet of provisions, which the viewers always take into the mine, and, as it providentially happened, there was an extra supply on this occasion, which had been entrusted to Nat for the Squire, if he wished for any refreshment. A small flask of sherry and a tin of sandwiches, with a few biscuits, were divided with those sufferers whom they could reach through chinks in the coal wall, and the "Squire's" own portion was, I know, the least of all! In spite of pain from an internal injury, poor Penrose tried to sing hymns—the hymns so dear to him—and to speak to his poor companions of the Gospel of Peace, to which they had given little heed in the chapel.

The last day of their imprisonment poor Penrose was too weak to say much, but he confided his young wife to Oliffe's care, and said that my words had taken more effect on her than a hundred sermons. She was a dear girl, he said, with a spirit that was like a wild horse when it broke loose, but

she had been a good girl to him of late, and Oliffe was to be sure to tell me this, if, indeed, he ever saw me again. Oliffe says that on that last day he had given up hope. Several near them had died, Penrose was dying, and he felt his strength ebbing like the tide of the sea. He says he stood face to face with death, and committed himself to God in Christ. He was faint and drowsy, and visions of light and brightness seemed to mock the surrounding gloom. He fancied he saw me with a child in my arms, and heard sweet singing, and then he seemed to himself to be a boy again sauntering in the old Rectory garden of St. Christopher's, where his childhood was passed. Nothing could be more distinct to him than the old-fashioned garden there, with the clumps of golden-brown wall-flowers, where the bees were humming, and his mother standing at the door, as he trotted up on his pony from school. He remembered being roused from this vision by sounds which grew louder and louder, then cries of joy from the rescuers as at last the way was opened into the dark prison-house.

The greatest care was necessary in the excavations, and no words can express the zeal and activity, which the hewers showed under the direction of the engineers and inspector. I was removed to Lord Bironville's house at the end of a fortnight, and here I gained strength daily, and was braced for the return home, and the meeting with the girls and dear mother.

It is strange that no one told me I should see poor little Edgar at Tulse Hill. I find Oliffe shrinks

from this subject, and till Mr. Murray comes to us next month nothing can be decided. Meantime Rhoda has been so kind as to take the child for a visit to her. By this act she has relieved me of a great difficulty, for the poor little fellow was in every one's way here, and the girls resented his presence as an intrusion, naturally, I admit; and I think it would be so much better if my husband would tell the story as it really is. It only makes a mystery where there really need be none; at least I think not. It is so strange to me to hear the boy call me Lady Alice, while I know I am his aunt. Besides, I feel as if I were allowing something to be believed which is not absolutely true. Nor is it fair or just to speak of Edgar as belonging only to Mr. Murray. He is a very strange child, and although behindhand in education, yet precocious in his mind. He has a fiery and undisciplined temper when it is roused, but a kind, loving word will often calm him at once. One day he rushed into my room to complain of something which had offended him, and threw over one of my little tables, on which stood a vase of flowers. The vase was broken, and fell with considerable force very near my baby's head, who was lying on my lap. It was a narrow escape, and Bertha, who was sitting with me, exclaimed:

"You naughty child, you have nearly killed the baby!"

For a moment Edgar stood motionless, and then, with flashing eyes, shouted:

"I should not mind if I had nearly killed you!"

"Oh! Edgar, Edgar," I said, "do not speak like that. Think of your uncle David—how grieved he would be."

"I would not hurt the baby for ten hundred ponies" (to possess a pony was his great ambition) —"no, not if Mr. Heathcote promised to give me them to-morrow. I love the baby, though I hate Sarah and Bertha."

He bent over poor unconscious little Oliffe, and kissed him, and then rushed away. He was found by Rhoda, when she came up to Tulse Hill that day, under a bush by the shrubbery-gate. He had got so far, and was waiting for the gate to be opened, that he might escape, for he could not reach the handle which lifted the latch. He was curled up like a ball, Rhoda said, and did not stir till she called him by name several times. When he raised his head his eyes were swollen with crying, and he sobbed out:

"I nearly killed the baby, and I am going to run away."

Rhoda brought him back to the house, and it was a few days after this that she offered to take him to Tudor Villa for a visit.

There is a most decided change in Rhoda; no one can help noticing it. Her sympathies are widened, and she is not so completely engrossed with her reading, and the work she does for Mr. Boddington.

She gives me the idea of a woman who is beginning to live out of herself, and finding the ways of unselfish thought for others sweet and pleasant.

The Boddingtons must ever be counted amongst our best friends. No words can describe all they were to us in that terrible time at Stonycroft. Mrs. Boddington, so calm and practical and self-possessed, and her husband, so full of clever suggestions and plans.

Geoffrey Wynne's engagement to Bertha gives me some uneasiness. He seems very delicate, and unfit for continuous exertion, and though I think much of his languor arises from temperament, still there is no doubt a great want of constitutional power and vigour about him. He is not congenial to my husband, he is oblivious about luncheon and dinner-hours, and he takes no interest in blue china! I am rather sorry that Oliffe will not consent to the marriage till the spring of next year. Long engagements are unsettling, and not wholesome to the people principally concerned, or to those who are connected with them. Bertha's literary tastes are decidedly amusing; she sits poring over books in the library, and writing essays on various subjects, which are posted to Geoffrey for correction, and are returned with several closely-written sheets of criticism, interspersed, I dare say, with morsels of love, like sweetmeats.

"Another of your thick love-letters," Sarah said last evening at dinner, when the letter-bag was emptied for the last post, and Oliffe distributed the letters to their owners. "Imagine reading that!" Sarah continued, as Bertha, after glancing at the contents of her large square envelope, thrust it into the pocket of her dress. "Imagine such a penance!"

Bertha's colour rose, but I must do her the justice to say that her good-temper and patience with Sarah are praiseworthy. I turned away the general observation from Bertha by holding up my letter, written in large round but well-shaped characters, and signed—"Cherry Penrose."

The poor thing is more zealous than ever in carrying on the work there which I gave her, and is holding bravely on her way in spite of all discouragements. Yes, Cherry is decidedly one bright spot in the dreariness and gloom of Stonycroft. I asked her here for a week or two, but she was out of her natural element, and the servants did not make her happy. I thought the change of scene might divert her from her sorrow, in which remorse is so largely mingled, but I saw she was glad to return to her cottage at Stonycroft and to be near her Nat's grave. I have made arrangements for her to stay in the same comfortable house, and the poor bereft mother is to live with her. She has, like many others, lost her chief support and stay, and Oliffe and I have done our best to provide for them all.

The expenses at "the Sarah" have been so large this year with the sinking the new shaft and the accident, that I cannot at present press my husband about the schools and church, but the time will come, and I must be patient.

July 25.—My cousin, Lord Clanmarina, really kept his promise, and looked me up. He stayed with us a week, and he and Oliffe became great friends. He is a pleasant middle-aged man who

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has never married, and has lived a great deal abroad. He wants Oliffe to stand for this division of the county at the next election, and told me again and again that he was the very man for Parliament. The right sort of "Liberal-Conservative," of which there are so few to be found. I think Oliffe does not dislike the idea, and really would think of accepting an invitation to stand if he is asked to do so.

Rhoda and little Edgar came up to spend the day when Conrad was here, and an instant impression was made on his mind that the child was like our family. "It will be better to tell him the story, at least," I said to Oliffe. "May I do so?"

But my husband still hesitates, and thus the matter remains. Edgar is devoted to Rhoda, and it is amusing to see how happy she is with him. I think she manages him very well, and I expect he will stay with her till he goes to school. He is really not ready for school at present; he can scarcely read easy words of one syllable, and has no idea of writing beyond large irregular characters which he copies from books. He will spend several hours writing to his uncle in this way, and Rhoda says will accept no help, but likes to be quite independent.

I had two dinner-parties while my cousin was here, and one garden-party. He was so pleasant and frank in his manners to every one, and I do hope he may have given the people in this neighbourhood a lesson. The foolish airs and silly little class distinctions which are the rule here annoy

me. It is not *what* people are, but *who* they are; not *how* they live, but *where* they live, which are the tests of worth. I do really think if many of the rich middle classes could know how vulgar such assumption is, and how it marks out people at once as underbred, there would be less of it. I agreed thoroughly with Geoffrey one day when we were speaking of Mr. Evans, who took a scholarship at Oxford and has gained great distinction there, and is now quite a leading man amongst those of his year, Sarah said:

"His father is a bookseller in a large commercial town; surely, mamma, you won't ask him to dinner."

"If Lady Alice wants her dinner to go off well, she will decidedly invite Evans," was Geoffrey's reply to Sarah with more spirit than he often shows. "Many a dinner-table at Oxford feels honoured by his presence, I can tell you."

"Oh, I know nothing about Oxford, but I am certain every one in Kingsholme would agree with me, that a man who is staying with those people who live in St. Anne's Street is not exactly the guest to choose to meet Lord Clanmarina."

"Knock such nonsense out of your head, then, Sarah, if the Kingsholme folk put it there, that is the best advice I can give you. St. Anne's Street!" and Geoffrey even took the trouble to laugh. "There is a saintly odour about the locality at all events."

Bertha always listens when her oracle speaks, and seldom volunteers an opinion, but she now

broke in with: "Very nice people live at St. Anne's Rectory. They are related to——"

"The Man in the Moon!" was Geoffrey's quiet rejoinder. "It is to be hoped that distinguished person belongs to the lunar aristocracy."

"I would rather belong to them than to red-hot Radicals," said Sarah with a toss of her head.

"Ah, Sarah!" was Geoffrey's retort in his languid way, which is nevertheless very telling, "the red-hot Radicals must look for their ancestry in the sun, the moon is too cold for them."

Miss Thornbury was so very kind to the girls during that terrible time last April that I must try in every possible way to show my sense of it. I asked her to both my dinners, and her youthful appearance made a decided impression on Conrad. She is really the youngest-looking woman of her age I ever saw. It is hard to believe she is Rhoda's age, and my senior, but so it is; and I only wish some one would make her happy, for she does hanker after the dignity of married life. Her home is not a very comfortable one; old Colonel Thornbury is a good deal of a martinet, and his wife tiresome to her children, by forgetting that they are no longer children, and talking of them in their presence or out of it. She has rehearsed to me again and again the number and quality of Dora's admirers, with always an expressed surprise, as a supplement, that Rhoda is not married—a thing which ought to surprise no one. Rhoda would not have been happy as a married woman in times past. Lately, I confess I have thought it might be

different, but I fear the only man in the world who might have suited her does not care for her.

July 27.—Little Edgar is come back to us. I saw my mother-in-law wished it, and that there was also something lurking in Rhoda's mind about it, which she did not tell me. The grandchildren's visits must not be interfered with, Rhoda said, but I knew there was something behind. Yesterday, when she was here with me, the real reason appeared.

We were sitting together in the garden, the girls gone to a garden-party with their father, and Rhoda and I were alone. Little Oliffe was in my arms asleep, when Edgar came to me with a curious little red fungus, which he thought a great treasure, and held up for admiration.

I said, in an absent way, "Yes, very pretty," and then went on about something else to Rhoda. But Rhoda entered into the merits of the fungus, agreed that it was not the same species as Willy Boddington's, and told Edgar to commit it to her care to take to him for his collection. While this discussion was going on, Miss Sambourne and a very tiresome friend of hers, who says "How lovely" to everything, were brought across the lawn by the footman.

Edgar's arm was thrown round Rhoda's neck as he spoke to her, and both their faces were glowing with interest and sympathy. I felt Miss Sambourne and her friend did not lose the point of our position. We were then obliged to listen to "Lovely little boy," as Edgar ran off. "You and he are great

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friends, Miss Heathcote. When is his papa coming back—to——”

I saw Rhoda's face flush painfully, and I hastened to interfere.

“Edgar's father is dead; he is an orphan. *My* friend Mr. David Murray,” emphasising the pronoun, “is his uncle.”

“Oh, uncle, is it? quite like an adopted child,” with a significant laugh.

“Rhoda,” I said, “will you go and call Kelly? and order tea to be brought out at once.”

“And now, Miss Sambourne,” I continued, “I must introduce you to my son.”

Rhoda went away, upsetting one of the garden-chairs, and catching her foot in Miss Sambourne's dress, which brought out a blunt “I am very sorry.”

I descanted on my little Oliffe's perfections, his likeness to his father, his good temper and healthy condition, till Kelly arrived for him. For I have made dear Kelly nurse, and added another maid to look after my dress, though I keep Kelly still as my personal attendant. I knew no one could love my boy as Kelly would, and love in every rank of life is the essence of service.

I parried the attacks of the two gossips with some skill when Rhoda returned, and by the help of tea, and a visit to the conservatory, and the judicious offering of a few ferns and roses, I despatched them at last in a state of supreme satisfaction.

But I was not prepared when they were gone for Rhoda's sudden and vehement flash of indignation.

"Now you see how it is. The hateful gossip of mean little souls follows me everywhere. What that woman said to-day is not new to me; that is why—why——"

The fire in those dark mysterious eyes, the colour of which I never can determine, was blotted out by a dim mist of tears.

"She has come to mother with all kinds of scandal and gossip for months. What right has she to talk of *him* or *me*? I think poor Dora Thornbury, in her love for me, has helped it, not meaning any harm; but Miss Sambourne and her shadow are the pests of the place and neighbourhood. They go about insinuating themselves by little attentions into people's good graces, and backbiting all their neighbours in turn."

"Oh, Rhoda," I said, "I am so sorry, but we must not be too hard on any one. We are all far too prone to talk about our friends, and repeat what is better kept back."

"You always find an excuse for every one, Alice, but I am not so charitable. Only——" and here her voice grew earnest, almost pathetic in its earnestness—"only do tell me little Edgar's real story. *Who is he?*"

How I longed to tell her everything, but my husband's will held me back. However, I answered: "Little Edgar is Mr. Murray's nephew, dear Rhoda."

"But what have *you* to do with it?"

"I will tell you before long. I would do so now were it not that I have been asked not to do so. Do trust me, Rhoda," I said, putting my arm round her as I dare not have done some months ago.

She responded to me with all the passion and energy of her nature, and said brokenly: "Alice, I do trust and love you." Sweet words from her.

Then, when she was quieter she told me much that was in her heart—of the pain all this foolish gossip had caused her, retailed as it was to her mother, and every possible construction put upon the most trivial things. I saw now plainly why the poor little boy she had so kindly taken and made happy had been returned to me, and I deeply regret that I ever consented to his going to Rhoda at all.

If in these days of effort to put down evil, a crusade could be preached against idle and too often hurtful gossip what a grand thing it would be! Single women with no very near ties lying deep at their hearts, are almost by necessity driven to people outside for interests. Often, indeed, do we see this take the noble form of zealous care and love for the poor and sick, and sometimes in the devotion of the gifts that God has given them to His service, in the higher cultivation of mental powers.

Still, who shall say how many thousands there are like poor Miss Sambourne, who live on surmises and conjectures, which they kindle into life and

seeming reality at the slightest pretence, and thus hand about from house to house, or, almost worse, by letter after letter, pure fictions, which may pierce some heart with positive pain, or fill it with bitterness and scorn.

I expected to hear sooner from Mr. Murray about his coming here, but he has been silent lately. Geoffrey heard he was trying for the head mastership of one of the reorganised public schools. I wonder if he will succeed.

July 31.—Oliffe and I were at the eight o'clock service at the Abbey this morning. How thankful I felt to kneel there again, and my *husband* with me, no words of mine can tell. Surely God has knit our souls more closely to each other, and I do trust also to Himself, since that dark, sad time at Stonycroft. Oliffe told me this morning as we walked slowly up the shrubbery-path together, that he felt the lifetime that was left too short to do all he could for God's service, and that he did long to make his life a living witness of his gratitude to Him for His goodness to us. We spoke of little Edgar, and he gave me leave to tell Rhoda and his mother the story so long withheld, adding:

"If *you* do not mind, my darling, it is cowardly of me to shrink from it; but I am naturally a coward at heart."

"You!" I said.

"Yes. I have been too much a slave to appearances and the good opinion of the world. Now I think I am a little braver, and I hope you will see

some foolish outside things drop from me, like the feathers of an old bird who is going to renew his plumage. There is one thing I wish to say, about the church and schools. I will put them in hand at once, and provide the man to minister amongst the people; only if I do, we must give up the idea of a London house next season, which we had planned. I could not afford both, and——”

“Surely,” I said, “you would not hesitate. I know you would not.”

“It is on your account if I do. Clanmarina, and Lord Bironville, and several others have said you ought to have your London house, and——”

“Nonsense!” I replied, “I am far, far happier without it; Conrad knows nothing about me. Oh, if you will really build the church we will never care about London till little Oliffe wants to go and see the Tower and Westminster Abbey, or I come to the House to hear you speak on some great question.”

“Far-off days; but I think we will not look forward so long as that; I was only thinking of two years. I have been in treaty for a house in Lancaster Gate, and have to give a decided answer to-morrow.”

“Then pray let it be ‘No,’” I said.

And so we settled it, my husband saying that the people who worked for his interests at the “Sarah” were his servants, and belonged to him, and that he must redeem the past if possible, and do all he could for their welfare, “especially since.”

he expressed it, "we have passed through the fire together—I, below with those who waited for death; you, above with those who watched and hoped for life against hope."

RHODA'S STORY.

“On every mountain peak,
See—what rest:
Over the pine-tops
Scarcely one, far off
Breathing confest.
Silent all birds in the forest lie,
Wait thou only, by-and-bye
Thou, too, shalt rest.”

From the German of Goethe.

RHODA'S STORY.

"Let every mountain peak
Be a memorial to
Over the years
Rhoda's one true life
Lived in the world
And all the love in the world
But then she died
And the world was left
Without a soul."

By the author of "The Story of the World"

RHODA.

THE SCHOOL HOUSE, STOURTON-UNDER-HILL,

January 22nd.

My birthday yesterday—I was forty. It is a great lift onwards in life to change the number of the decade: there is a younger ring in the sound of thirty-nine, which I called myself this day last week.

I am alone to-day, with the snow falling fast and thick upon the deserted playground, the disconsolate gymnasium-poles, the tall elm-trees, where, through the pure white covering, round black spots show where the rooks have their homes in spring.

I have been waiting for the leisure-time to come when I could write up the story of my middle age, begun three years ago, and now I think it is here. No one wants me to-day; I have answered my birthday letters, and there seems nothing to mend or make—not even somebody's pens! For when people have ideas of the "old school," as Geoffrey Wynne calls it, they use quill pens—an obvious disadvantage to their relations, especially if their stock of penknives is limited and blunt.

And now I feel like a traveller who knows there is a bright valley laughing in the sunlight for him, but knows, too, before he reaches it he must cross a dark and rugged plain, where the path is thorny

and difficult, and, like the pilgrim of old, "his soul is discouraged because of the way."

I know the retrospect must be painful, but as my preceding chapters have been read, and I have been asked to carry on my tale—interesting, I know, to *one* ear at least—I will do so.

Mother and I went away together to the sea in the July after the accident at the Sarah Mine. I was restless and fretful, and oh, how disagreeable! Gossip, and the foolish talk of friends and acquaintances, seemed to bring back my old morbid distaste to everybody but mother and the Boddingtons.

Then a change came there. Charlie wanted to travel, and Margaret decided to go with him and take the girls, leaving poor Willy at a little school, where Edgar was placed about the same time.

Thus I was cut off from the great pleasure of the Boddingtons' society. The house in St. Michael's Terrace was let for a year, and on a dismal, misty August evening my best friends came to Hollywater to say a long good-bye, and left me the next morning weary and sad at heart.

Dear mother! how kind she was to me; how cheerfully she offered to take Willy Boddington for his midsummer holidays; and how she set herself in every way to turn my thoughts into a happy groove! With her how beautiful was the evening-time light! I can remember the days when she would speak impetuously—when she would be vexed and flurried about trifles; but since Oliffe was given back to her—that crowning mercy of her old age—though her bodily strength had been failing,

her spirit seemed to be calmed down into the utmost gentleness and peace. There was not the slightest sign of decay of mental power—she enjoyed reading as much as ever; but I noticed during that summer that she cared more for the books of her past than for new ones of the present time, and for her Bible most of all.

We stayed at Hollywater for three months. Oliffe came to see us, and Alice and the baby, and the two girls; and for a month of our stay we had Nellie and her children, and Janet and hers, in a large old-fashioned farmhouse which mother provided for them, and where they boarded themselves.

I grumbled sorely at the time at this army of relations. I grew sick to death of the complaints, or rather little disparaging remarks, the mothers made of each other's sons and daughters. I believe this is a very common feature of a united clan at the sea-side, and really means nothing; but it worried me all the same.

Then the two mothers were equally uncomplimentary about each other's housekeeping. Poor Janet very justly considered Nellie's ideas extravagant, and there were perpetual differences of opinion as to which went furthest—a leg of mutton or ribs of beef; and as the butcher called every Saturday for his orders for the week, Friday evening was a much dreaded time.

We had our love troubles too. Little Agnes was followed to Hollywater by a rich but certainly very empty-headed and not over-refined admirer. Janet was all anxiety that dear Agnes should make him happy; while Agnes, with the memory of Geoffrey

Wynne still fresh in her little faithful soul, shrank from the good-natured fellow, whose aspirations were limited to the rise or fall of shares, who could talk of little else than the price of stock, and the marvels of the Exchange, and would sit with a blank stare of bewilderment at Agnes' suppressed contempt as he descanted on what to him was a source of intense interest—the one interest in his life.

He tried to insinuate himself into Agnes's good graces by bringing her a gaudily-bound copy of Tennyson's Poems.

I felt rather sorry for him, I confess, when Agnes said she had an old Tennyson, and she never could use another.

"That ugly brown-covered book, Agnes! Surely you can't think that as nice as this!" her mother said angrily.

"My Tennyson is a green book, and quite good; you are thinking of Robert Browning, mother."

"I am thinking that you are very discourteous," her mother said sharply, "and I am quite ashamed of you."

Soon after this Agnes, obeying my advice, gave the poor young stockbroker a kind but decided intimation that she could not love him, and he went away disconsolate. Even the big carbuncle in the ring on his little finger looked dull, and his curly brown hair limp and unbrushed. But we had the satisfaction of hearing a few months after that he consoled himself with the daughter of a poor curate, and I dare say is rejoicing in his suburban villa with rows of gaily-bound books on two crimson

shelves in his drawing-room, which represent to him as much of the poets as he cares to know.

After the relations were gone, mother and I had a quiet happy time. It was soft glowing weather, which comes to us sometimes in September, and she enjoyed it thoroughly. As Oliffe and Alice were in Scotland and the girls with them, little Edgar and Willy Boddington were sent to us for their Michaelmas holidays, and we were to return to Kingsholme to receive them. It was our last evening; mother, with her hand on my arm, walked in the path skirting the sea which is shadowed by sweet-scented firs. There was scarcely a ripple on the water, and a lovely crimson glow was reflected from the western sky. We sat down on one of the benches which are so full earlier in the season, and now almost deserted. Mother used to come to Holly-water with us when we were children, and her thoughts were in the past to-night. She laughed softly to herself once, and I said:

“What is amusing you, mother?”

“Remembrances of you, Rhoda, as you came barefoot across those sands once when you were a little girl of ten or eleven years old. Oliffe was reading with a friend on one of these benches, and was so greatly shocked at the ragged little girl with a shrimping-net, who came towards us with the announcement that her shoes and stockings were swept away by the tide.”

“Poor Oliffe,” I said, “I can fancy what a blow it was to him to acknowledge me as a sister.”

“I don’t think he did acknowledge you,” mother

said, "but went on reading after that first shocked glance, while I led you away home."

"I think I remember it," I said, "only there were so many scrapes of the same kind. I know you heard of it from Oliffe afterwards."

"Yes," mother said with a little sigh, "dear Oliffe always liked everything to look nice about him. When do they come home?"

"About the 4th of October, I think—very soon now."

Mother replied nothing to this, but rising, said:

"It is getting chilly, I think."

I threw another shawl over her, but I felt her hand was very cold. Once she turned to look again at the sea. A ship was coming in towards Brent harbour, which lay round a point to our right.

"Look, Rhoda, at that ship." The glow of the sunset was on its sails as it passed towards its haven. "No picture of life can be better than that of a ship making a long voyage, and then coming home quietly and gently like that. 'So He bringeth them into the haven where they would be.'"

"Don't stand still any longer," I said half-impatiently, for I always resented anything like an allusion to parting, her going from me. Mother moved on, and presently said:

"Have you heard anything of Mr. Murray lately?"

"My dear mother, how should I?"

"I always hoped he would have come here this summer," mother said; "I thought he liked us—liked *you*."

"People change," I said bitterly; "there are heaps of men and women who use their friends like

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gloves, wear them when it suits them, and then take them off and try a new pair." I was pleased with my clever simile and laughed, not a pleasant laugh, I dare say, for mother sighed.

"We did very well for Mr. Murray at Malvern," I continued, "it suited him to come there with Charles Boddington. Now I dare say, if we could see, he has found people who suit him much better."

"He did not strike me as that kind of person," mother said gently, "but you knew him better than I did."

How her words gave me a dull aching pain at the back of my heart.

"I did think I knew him, but after all it was a mistake, I suppose. So few things and people are really what they seem: but don't let us talk any more platitudes."

"Well," mother said, "the whole story of poor little Edgar's birth and Mr. Murray's behaviour in that matter must raise him always above the common level."

Oliffe had at last allowed Alice to tell us the history of little Edgar. His mother was Mr. Murray's sister, and she had been entrapped into a false marriage by Lord Clanmarina's son, who was married already to another woman. It is a hateful story, except that its details bring out the noble chivalrous nature of the one who suffered for others so uncomplainingly, in the brightest light. He lost money and position, and for a time gave up country and friends, to protect and shield the sister who had been so cruelly deceived. When she died, and her mother also, the boy fell to his uncle's sole

charge till he shared the responsibility with Alice. Both Alice and Oliffe have acted most kindly in the matter, but I foresee future difficulty when Edgar's inquiring temperament tries to find out all about his father, as he most certainly will. Even at ten years old he asks perplexing questions; what will they be at fifteen?

Alas! mother caught a chill that last evening at Hollywater. We returned the next day to receive Willy Boddington and Edgar, and Mona came to me in the night to say mother's breathing was much oppressed. I went to her and found it was only too true. For three days and nights I never left her, and the doctors were in and out all day. I felt there was no hope, she was going from me. I telegraphed for Oliffe and for Francis, and the latter arrived late on Saturday night. Oliffe's address had changed, and I had many fears that he would not be in time.

Towards the evening of Sunday the cough ceased, and my dearest mother lay calm and quiet. I thought that she might get better, and followed the doctors from the room almost confidently. Alas! I knew by their faces more than from their words that I must return to see her die. What a night that was, we kept her alive with stimulants, and I saw her dear eyes turn towards the door every moment. Oliffe was on her lips and in her heart. Mona shared my watch, but I made both her and Francis lie down about two o'clock. Then I was alone with her; suddenly she began to talk in her natural voice, of common things, all things that had happened long ago. Not a word of recent sorrows,

the fearful mine accident, the terror and the trouble of the previous spring. It was all about St. Christopher's Rectory, of my father, of the old church, of my baptism there, and of Nellie's birth. Then of the babies she had lost, lying in the quiet churchyard under the daisies.

"Is Oliffe not come in from school?" she asked once. "I hope the new pony is safe."

"Don't let little Rhoda run away; let her take your hand, dear."

Evidently she was addressing my father. "I am coming, dear," she said again and again.

Then the dreamy past vanished, and she pressed my hand as I sat by her.

"Rhoda, we have been so happy together. Give them all my love; they would have come if they could. Tell them not to mind——Oliffe——"

As she spoke this word I heard a ring at the door, then his step, and he came and knelt down by her, unable to control himself, for he was worn out with his long journey.

"Oliffe, my dear boy!" Those were her last words addressed to any earthly ear. I called Francis and Mona, and my brothers both being unable to command themselves, I read the commendatory prayer. Her voice sounded once more far away, "Lord Jesus, refuge of my soul." And as the autumn morning dawned she entered into her rest, and I was desolate. Some women have many loves in their lives. I have had but few, and one was my mother. Months have passed away, but I cannot write of that morning when I was left alone, nor of the succeeding days of cold, dark sorrow

without tears. I am so happy now, but I do long sometimes to have mother to tell her that I am happy.

"Your dear mother has been spared to a good old age; you must be thankful to have had her so long." How such words of hackneyed consolation jarred on me in those first days of my grief. Poor Nellie's baby was born on the very day of mother's death. She could not come to her, and I have been very sorry for my sister. Her early marriage and settlement in a distant place separated her from mother, but she loved her as we all did, and I think the unmarried daughter living with the surviving parent is too apt to consider a monopoly of the sorrow hers by right. Perhaps I did. I left all the arrangements of her funeral to Oliffe and Francis. I sat tearless and cold, chilled to the very heart, in the silent room, and yet felt my greatest comfort was there. We took her to her quiet grave in St. Christopher's Churchyard, where my father and her infant children lie. We had beautiful flowers in great profusion from Tulse Hill and from other places. Oliffe had great satisfaction in them, and it was so characteristic of him to order the particular places which each wreath should occupy. There will always be in my brother a due regard for outward things. I will not say "undue," for he has been so good to me.

Dear Alice was also very gentle and unobtrusive in her help. She ordered my mourning, and left me to myself, the thing of all others I coveted. Many tokens of kindness and sympathy reached me, and Dora Thornbury took charge of Willy and Edgar by day, though they slept at Tulse Hill. I

was quite unprepared for Edgar's burst of tears when he came to see me the day before he and Willy returned to school.

"Oh, Rhoda, Rhoda, I will love you twice as much now."

This genuine childlike outburst did much for me. I cried with him long and heartily, and the great weight at my heart grew less.

There was nothing for me to do but to stay on at the old house, where we had lived so many years together, mother and I. So I put away her dear possessions, folded up her two black silk gowns and white shawls with loving care, and locked her knitting basket away in the wardrobe. All her letters and papers were in such beautiful order, and she had destroyed so many, that my task was light. Some manuscript books were left, and I used to sit and read them over and over again, and trace out by them the story of her calm, uneventful life; thinking all the time, "when I die, who will care thus for what I leave behind?"

A most dreary, desolate winter followed. I went about like a machine—to church, up to Tulse Hill and back again; even to see some poor old people; but my heart felt dead. I think if the Boddingtons had been at home I should have roused myself sooner. I grew thinner, and my grey hairs multiplied. Mona wrote to Nellie, and the result was that Nellie and the two youngest children offered themselves for a visit. So we lighted large fires, and got the little crib ready, and tried to put on an appearance of Christmas brightness.

Bertha's wedding came off at Tulse Hill on New

Year's Day. Poor Bertha, with all her love of smart dresses, and show, and brightness, had to submit to her lord, who ruled with undisputed sway.

"He hates a fuss about a wedding," Bertha said to Nellie one day; "he hates it, Aunt Nellie, and if we were not in mourning I should have no bridesmaids or finery; in fact, I should like to walk to church, only it may snow, and it is a long way; but we are only going down in the carriage just like another day. We don't invite anybody, but anybody may come."

"Such affected nonsense, Bertha," Nellie said; "it's not Christian!"

Bertha curled her pretty rosy mouth.

"Christian!" she repeated.

"No," said Nellie triumphantly. "'The virgins that be her fellows should bear her company.' What book does that come from, Bertha?"

"I am sure I don't know. Geoffrey would hate to see a troop of people dressed up in veils and wreaths just because I was going to be his wife."

"In veils and wreaths! Who would wish it at this time?" said poor Nellie, her eye glancing at mother's vacant chair; "but your sister and cousins just quietly dressed in white muslin."

In spite of remonstrance it all fell out as Geoffrey wished. He and Bertha were married after the eight o'clock matins in the Abbey on New Year's morning, and Bertha was accompanied only by her father and Alice; Sarah, enveloped in ermine and lavender silk; Hilda Wynne, and Mr. Castleton, a relation of theirs.

I could not make up my mind to go formally to

the wedding, quiet as it was. I went with Mona to the Abbey as a spectator only. I should hope Geoffrey was satisfied, for everything was as unpretentious as possible. The bridegroom was almost too languid to make his responses at all, and the bride was tremulous and uncertain; afraid, I think, of showing too much feeling. Sarah was grand and scornful, Hilda smiling and pleased, while my brother stood by grave and stern, his heart busy with the past. When the service was over nature asserted itself, and Bertha turned with a sudden gesture, and threw herself into her father's arms, who kissed her tenderly, and then recovering herself, she looked, as Geoffrey wished, as if there were nothing in a wedding to make a fuss about. Bertha's white silk dress, made by Alice's dress-maker, was the perfection of simple grace, and could not have been improved; while Alice, in her long silver-grey silk train and bonnet to match, looked, as Dora Thornbury said, "every inch an Earl's daughter." The party went back to an every-day breakfast at Tulse Hill, and so Geoffrey Wynne won his bride. In his heart he loves her dearly, and in his heart he was moved by this event as by many other things; but after the fashion of his day and generation, in a little clan of men and women, the manifestation of feeling is decreed to be "common," and we are to take things as they come, as matters of course.

This peculiar and fast-spreading fashion makes it "out of taste" to read the works of the great poets with a particle of expression. "Mr. Sludge, the Medium," the "Ode to Immortality," "Evelyn

Hope," "Lady Clara Vere de Vere," "Hamlet," and the "Palace of Art," must all be read in one low, melancholy, passionless monotone. By the same rule, no expression of admiration is allowed of a great picture; nothing beyond a prolonged gaze and perhaps a remark under the breath. The same too with Alpine snow-peaks and sunset-glows—no one must hear any expressed delight. Girls come back from a long tour, and when uninitiated middle-aged women ask for, and expect some bright and happy account of their travels, they only hear that "This place was rather a bore," and that no one cares to go to the Oberland now it is such a beaten track!

Doubtless this is the swinging back of the pendulum after a season of exaggerated and ridiculous sentiment, but is it not in many cases just as false and irritating to those who see through the mask? If a poet, or a picture, or a scene in nature, or the character of a man or woman honestly touches us, why should we be ashamed to say so? and why should we school ourselves to read the works of our great masters in a tone which is more like the low drone of bees in a hive than anything else?

Willy Boddington went under Mr. Murray's care to spend his holidays at Mentone. Margaret's longing for her boy could not be repressed, and they had a joyful meeting.

May and Lily wrote me the most happy letters. They revelled amongst the sunshine and flowers, and I, sitting cold and frozen, felt a pang of jealousy as I thought of that pleasant party there in the sunny south. Both Charlie and Margaret wanted

me much to join them, but I saw Oliffe did not wish me to do so, and then I had Mona to consider. I could not leave her alone and sad, for she misses her dear mistress every day. Charlie wrote and urged me to work, and sent me an Italian book—nothing very important—telling me to translate it, and not to trouble myself whether it would be published or not.

But I did not know Italian thoroughly, and it was weary work. Little Edgar was at Tulse Hill for the Christmas holidays, and came down to see me on every possible pretence.

He was a great comfort to me in those dull dreary afternoons, when the shadows danced upon the walls of our pretty drawing-room, and out of the silence and the dimness I used to listen for mother's voice, then start with a throb of pain as I remembered she would never speak to me again.

One morning in January, two days after my thirty-ninth birthday, Edgar came bounding in to say Uncle David had come home, and had bought him a pair of skates. There was ice on the water, called by courtesy a "lake," in the plantation above Tulse Hill. Would I go and see him skate?

"Will I come and see you break your legs?" I said. "It takes many lessons to teach a little boy to skate."

"Do come, Rhoda. Uncle David said I might ask you, and I walked down into the town with him, and he bought me the skates at Stevens'. They are drilling a hole in the straps, and we are to call for them."

So Mr. Murray is actually in Kingsholme, and

had not come to see me, nor brought me any message from the Boddingtons', I thought.

"Where is Willy?" I asked Edgar.

"Oh, he is to stay at Mentone till Easter. His mamma could not part with him. How nice it must be to have a mother!" the child said involuntarily. "I dream of mine sometimes, and she *is* so pretty." Then in a mysterious voice he added: "I never dream of my father. No one ever talks of him; that must be the reason, mustn't it?"

"Well," I said, avoiding an answer to the question, "I will go and get ready, while you pay Mona a visit, for you are in a hurry to be off, I see."

We called for Edgar's little skates, and we were soon walking quickly up Tulse Hill, and girls and boys, with their skates swinging at their sides, went on before us or following us. One of Oliffe's keepers, whom I knew, was guarding the ice as we approached.

"It is quite safe, I suppose?" I said to him.

"Oh yes, miss; there is only one weakish part, and Mr. Heathcote has had that rope put across from the two banks, so there can't be no fear."

Acquaintances and friends whom I had not seen for some time were here, and Alice came with Oliffe, and Hilda Wynne, who was still at Tulse Hill.

Edgar managed wonderfully for a beginner, and picked himself up after every fall with a merry laugh. I watched him with amusement, and I am sure I had not taken my eyes from him for more than two minutes, when I missed him.

The attention of spectators and skaters was directed to some wonderful feats performed by two

young ladies at the farther end of the lake. The centre was almost empty, and no one was on the bank near me. Suddenly I heard a shout, and saw Edgar had gone by himself to the weak part of the ice.

I called to him to come back, and went on to the ice with uncertain steps, for I was, of course, behind the fashion of these days, and never learned to disport myself either on rollers or on ice.

"Edgar, Edgar!" I called.

But the child knew no danger, and went on unsuspecting, now on his hands, now up again, laughing as he doubled himself up like an acrobat.

"I must reach him," I said, and struggled on.

I put out my hand, and he lurched to avoid me. Then I heard a swish and crack, and the water came oozing up over the slippery plain.

"Come back—come back, miss!" (it was the keeper's voice); "it won't bear—it won't bear a cat under that willow!" The voice sounded in my ear loud and clear. "I dare not come along to you," the man said. "Turn back to your left!" he shouted.

"To the left!" sounded another voice.

I knew that voice well. I had Edgar's hand in mine, and gave him a too sudden pull. We both fell, and the child was in the water, while I lay on the perilous ice grasping his arm, and holding him up with all the strength I had.

"Keep still, Edgar," I said; "keep very still, and they will soon come and help us," and with marvellous nerve the boy did keep still, and did not struggle.

The dreadful cracking noise went on, and bit after bit of the ice gave way. The opening in the dark water grew larger, and the child seemed slipping from my grasp. Then, with a great shelve, I felt the whole collapse, and I was sinking surely into the cold depths below.

I shudder now as I recal that moment of falling, like the strange sensation we often experience when, losing ourselves in sleep, we wake with a sudden jerk, as if falling down an abyss. But even in that peril there was sweetness. The voice which I had recognised was very near me, calling me by name.

"Rhoda! Rhoda! I am here! I have a rope—try to catch it—Rhoda!"

Then, with a flash of recognition, I saw Mr. Murray creeping on his hands and knees towards me, throwing a rope along the ice.

With one arm I held Edgar; with the other I clung desperately to the edge of ice. If I failed to grasp the rope, we must go down. Again the rope was propelled towards me, and closing my eyes for one moment, I opened them to look steadily at the loop of stout rope, on which my chance of life rested. It was quite near me now, and the crackling and swishing noise grew more and more. I made one desperate effort, and caught the rope with that energy with which a drowning man catches at a straw.

"Thank God!" were the next words I heard, spoken with a fervour never, never to be forgotten.

"I can't hold on much longer," I gasped, "and Edgar is weighing me down!"

But help came from another quarter. The keeper and some men were creeping towards the other side of the chasm, and while I felt my cold hand locked in a firm, strong grasp, I heard them say:

"The child is all right now."

The keeper's son, a boy of fourteen, had bravely ventured on the thin ice from the other side, and I felt little Edgar gradually raised and taken from the clasp of my other arm.

Thus I was left, supported by the strong hand, and with other assistance I was at last, though not without difficulty, extricated from my dangerous position.

When at last I was on *terra firma*, and saw the people crowding round, and Alice's pale, frightened face, I began to realise what had passed. But I did not wish to make a scene, and, wringing the water out of my dress, said I could walk home.

Little Edgar was in the keeper's arms, pale, and his teeth chattering with terror. He held out his arms to me, and said:

"Rhoda, Rhoda! you held me up!"

"You were very good and brave, Edgar," I said. "If you had struggled——"

But my voice faltered, and warned me to say no more.

"No, I am not hurt," I said, in answer to Dora Thornbury, who came up; "I only want to get home to dry myself. Do let little Edgar be taken to Tulse Hill and put to bed," I said, addressing Mr. Murray; "see how he is shivering;" and then I struck off into a side-path I knew would take me into the grounds of Tulse Hill, and I should soon be home.

But Oliffe came after me.

"Rhoda, you must not go home alone. Get into a carriage; you are so wet."

"But I know I should only get cold," I urged. "Please, dear Oliffe, let me have my own way!"

I was conscious that my words were heard by other ears than my brother's, and that Mr. Murray had followed me. I had never thanked him, but I turned now and said:

"Good-bye. Thank you very much for——"

Again there was the choking at my throat, and I set off walking as fast as possible, feeling secure of meeting nobody, till I turned into the road from the shrubbery.

I think the very climax of my loneliness and desolation was reached that day when I got home, and there was no mother to receive me, to be full of tender care and anxious solicitude about me.

Mona looked with sorrow at my ruined crape, and she was very kind, and helped me to take off my wet things.

I was hot enough by this time, my cheeks burning; and I felt very stiff and miserable as I lay back in a chair by the fire all the rest of the afternoon, worn out and sad.

Alice and Oliffe both came to look after me, and Alice urged me to go to bed. She was tender and loving, as she always is.

"Edgar was safe in bed, and sent me his best love," she said.

Oliffe called for Alice about six o'clock, and they went away together, looking so happy in each other.

Then, as the door closed on them, I felt more than ever I had done before what loneliness meant.

Inquiries came from many of those who had been at the lake.

Dora Thornbury was the only one I saw, fortunately for me. She was going to a ball, or she would have spent the evening with me. She kissed and stroked me, and knelt down by me, after her fashion, and I was so unresponsive and cross.

"You ought to be in bed," were her last words, "or you will have rheumatic fever. Mamma says so; do lie in bed to-morrow; there is nothing to make it necessary for you to get up."

She was right, I thought. If I were to lie in bed for a month, who would miss me—who would want me? I would take her advice, and keep there out of everybody's way.

Then I sent away my tea, untouched, in spite of Mona's remonstrance; and after piling a huge log of wood upon the fire, she too left me alone.

Then my brain began to be active with the events of the day—that dark, yawning gulf, the crackling ice, the far-off voices, Edgar's little body slipping from me, while I was, too, slipping out of the world! and where?—had I gone down into those icy depths, what then? I could not answer the question.

About eight o'clock there was a ring at the bell.

"Somebody else sending a card or a message," I thought; but the door opened, and, as once before, Mona roused me by saying:

"Mr. Murray, Miss Heathcote."

He came towards me with two or three great

strides, and without a word took my hand in his; it was burning hot now,—and he looked down into my face.

“You ought to be in bed,” he said; “a shock like that tells on every one more or less.”

“Oh, I am very strong,” I replied; “but I was just making up my mind to lie in bed for a month; and indeed if I never get up again it would make very little difference to anybody.”

“Are you sure of that?” he said. “Rhoda, are you sure?”

“Well,” I replied evasively, “there are a few who might like to see me once more—Margaret Boddington and——”

“There is *one* who would find it hard to know he must live without you,” he said, in his quiet, low voice—a voice like none other in the world. “Now you know what I mean,” he went on, and I felt the hand which held mine, was trembling—“you know what I mean. I have so little to offer you; but I want you—*you*—your love! Will you give it to me?”

“Oh, I am so tired,” I said helplessly; “don’t ask me to-night. Besides, I should not suit you—I am so often cross, and I don’t like people, and then I get bored, and only mother could ever really put up with me.”

“That is your character of yourself, is it?” he said quietly. “Well, it makes no difference. I have been thinking of you incessantly for two years. I see in you all I want—more than I deserve—as a wife!”

“Hush!” I said. “Don’t make me feel so humble; I don’t like it.”

But he made me feel still more humble before he had done, and he makes me more and more humble every day. From that evening when I laid my head on his breast, and knew that the love of a noble, chivalrous man was mine, the greatness of the gift has only made me feel unworthy.

I cannot even wish that this had come earlier in life, except that I have an aching longing sometimes that mother should see me as I am. When I look back on days past, and remember how I lived in my own little world of books and reading, and allowed myself to look down on my friends and neighbours, I am heartily ashamed of myself. Living with David, whose every feeling is high-toned and pure, whose life is and ever has been a crusade against all that is mean, and small, and ignoble, how could I help being the better for it? Then his religious faith is anchored so fast, and I may say with all reverence that I *know* that is the power that makes itself felt through my husband's daily life.

Unexpectedly to himself and to his friends David was elected head-master of Stourton last Easter. It is not a post of very great importance. I mean it is not a stepping-stone to anything very exalted, and as he has never taken orders, deaneries, and bishoprics, and canonries can never hold out their enchantments to us.

But Stourton-on-the-Hill is an old Henry VIII. foundation, which has just been reorganised; and David has taken it up with all his heart. Charlie Boddington is delighted, and writes him the most amusing letters.

We were married almost as quietly as Bertha was, last June. I had a great deal to go through first in winding up the affairs of my old home and of my single life, and I got sometimes into my old fumes, and worries, and discouragements. But once fairly off with David I felt a new woman, and when Margaret greeted me at Salzburg she said:

"Why, Rhoda, how well you look! twenty years younger at least!"

We had such a happy two months, we pleasant quartette of friends, and the children were not more childlike in their enjoyment. We were none of us too grand to confess ourselves happy, and Charlie's poem, for which he went to study abroad, is such a success. He read it to us in those days, and David criticised, and Margaret played, and sang, and sketched, and I did nothing but tell God a hundred times in the day that I *was* thankful and happy. Then I made friends during our travels with the wife of a master of one of the large public schools, who loves the boys in her house, and looks after them in every way; not regarding them, as too many masters' wives do, as so many convenient or inconvenient representatives of so many pounds a year.

Mrs. Maxwell is quite of another type, and gave me many useful lessons. Of course dear Mona is with me, and I can never part from her, but I have a nice bright matron too, and our first term has passed off grandly.

I wonder how many times in these snowy days Mona has been in to say:

"Write, write. Why, you are as bad as ever."

"Not quite," I say, in reply.

And now, in the afternoon of the second day, I must make haste and wind up, for David will be here by six o'clock, and I shall have so much to hear about Tulse Hill, where he has taken little Edgar to finish his holidays, and where he is to meet Geoffrey and Bertha and Nellie.

I have just been to his study to put a finishing touch there; pile up great wood logs on the fire, which he likes, and see that his table has not been disturbed. I always try to keep some flowers on his table; there are a few snowdrops to-day, bought this morning from one of the little Stourton children, whose mother is ill, and for whom she came for some soup.

Jan. 27.—It was our first parting, and who shall say how sweet the meeting was? How glad at heart I was when I opened the door and looked out on the dazzling purity of the snowy night, and saw the tall dark figure coming up the drive with the little travelling satchel in his hand. How delightful it was to feel his arms round me, to go into the bright cheerful study with him, to see him beam on me with his brightest smile.

"Well," he says, "you seem glad to get the schoolmaster back again. What mischief have you been at in his absence?"

"I will tell you," I said, "when you have had your supper, or tea, or dinner. Look! there are six letters. I think they are all about new boys."

"I dare say; but I shall not open them yet. There was a party at Tulse Hill last night."

"Oh," I said, "and you had not your proper dress coat."

"I did very well, never mind," was the reply. "I heard the Bishop of Coversley inquire who I was, and what do you think was the answer given by Mr. Willoughby?"

"I don't know," I said; "but I am glad the Bishop of Coversley noticed you."

"Ah! but the answer to the question. Don't you want to hear?"

"Go on," I said.

"*'Only a schoolmaster; he married a sister of Mr. Heathcote's.'* Now are you satisfied? *Only a schoolmaster!*"

"Ah! David, Mr. Willoughby ought to have added, 'what a grey-haired wife you had.'"

"You only say that to bring out the rest, and you shan't be spared a word. 'A sister of Mr. Heathcote's; a very clever, handsome woman, but rather strong-minded, you know!'"

"Stop!" I said, "I won't hear any more about myself, certainly not that dreadful word, which reminds me of what you said of me in the hall at St. Michael's Terrace years ago."

"I have changed my opinion now; you are decidedly weak-minded. You know you have married a schoolmaster, and what sensible woman would do that? Ah! my love, it is nice to get home again," he said tenderly; and I thought, though I said nothing, that in all England that night there was not a happier woman than the schoolmaster's wife.

LADY ALICE'S STORY.

“And not by Eastern windows only,
When daylight comes, comes in the light,
In front, the sun climbs slow—how slowly,
But westward, look, the land is bright.”

ARTHUR HUGH CLOUGH.

LADY ALICE'S STORY

Lady Alice was a young girl of
fifteen years of age, and was
the daughter of a nobleman.
She was very beautiful, and
was much admired by all
who knew her. She was
very kind and gentle, and
was very popular among
her friends. She was
very fond of music, and
was very good at it. She
was also very fond of
reading, and was very
well read. She was
very kind and gentle, and
was very popular among
her friends. She was
very fond of music, and
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was also very fond of
reading, and was very
well read.

LADY ALICE.

TULSE HILL,
July, 1875.

A HOLIDAY was proclaimed at Stonycroft last Tuesday, and I think it was one of the happiest days of my life.

Our little church was consecrated on that day, and the school and reading-room were opened. Oliffe and I, and our boy arrived at Mr. Thompson's house on the Monday evening, and as we went through Stonycroft the bells of the old church rang a merry peal of welcome. Oliffe and I went round to visit our friends after dinner, and most touching to me were the welcomes we met with. Perhaps the best part of all was a quiet hour I spent with Cherry in her home.

She is now a beautiful and refined-looking woman. Dressed in her plain black dress and small white cap, she is quite unlike any one I ever saw.

Pride and self-will are dead in her. She is a chastened, gentle woman, humble and mistrustful of herself, but exercising an untold influence on others.

Her mission is now principally that of attending the sick, and even while we were talking together a message came for Mrs. Penrose to go directly to

a poor girl who was ill. Her little school is of course now merged in the larger one, but she still teaches knitting, in which she has no rival, and she produced with pride six pairs of lovely little pure white socks she had knitted for my boy. I could not write all she said to me, but it is only a fresh proof that sympathy is never wasted, and she summed up all she said with the touching words:

"Ah, my lady, you *felt* for me, and instead of preaching at me, you showed me how beautiful it is to be good. Oh!" she added, passionately, "I do so hope my Nat knows I am a better girl now."

That longing for the approbation and sympathy of our dead is a sort of instinct in our human hearts; perhaps they can discern and rejoice over the good, though spared the mourning over the evil.

We had a tent erected a little way from the mine, where the people were to have a cold dinner after the business of the morning. A great many of our own friends and neighbours arrived by ten o'clock. The Bironvilles, the Willoughbys, Mr. Murray and Rhoda and little Edgar, the Boddingtons, Geoffrey and Bertha, and Sarah.

The bishop drove over from a place in the neighbourhood, and we all walked in procession from the school-house, with plenty of flags and banners, in which the miners delight, and singing heartily, if not harmoniously, "Onward, Christian Soldiers."

The consecration over, Oliffe opened the school-room and reading-room with a few words. I was standing by his side with little Oliffe.

Then came the dinner and the speeches, and a very extensive tea in the school-house for the mothers and children.

When I thought of all the pain and sorrow we had gone through in this very place, my heart could only say that by God's great mercy "we who had sown in tears were reaping in joy." Perhaps—who can tell?—without that time of trouble we should not have been moved to prompt action about the church. It is for the present made a district of Stonycroft, and one of Mr. Barlow's curates is to look after it as his especial charge.

It was delightful to me to see that the frequenters and upholders of the little oblong chapel did not hold back from us. Indeed, one of the most characteristic speeches of the day came from the "viewer" who had taken poor Penrose's place. It was a perfect specimen of rough, simple eloquence, and touched us all.

At last it was all over, and the guests departed, while comparative silence reigned over the mine. At twelve o'clock the fires were re-kindled, and the business of the world below began again with renewed vigour.

Mr. Murray and Rhoda stayed with us for the night. Sarah and the rest were glad to escape from the atmosphere of smoke and ashes, and returned to Tulse Hill.

Rhoda and I had a quiet time together the next

morning early, and went into the church to examine it more carefully.

The name of Nathaniel Penrose and of those who perished in the mine at the time of Oliffe's deliverance are inscribed on a plain marble slab in the porch, where all who pass in can see them.

I chose the words which are beneath:

“ ‘The darkness and the light are both alike to Thee.’
With Thee is the fountain of life, and in Thy light we shall see
light.”

The east window is put in by dear Rhoda in memory of her mother.

Charles Boddington ordered it at Munich last year, and it is a scene which the eyes of many of the simple-hearted people will understand and love to look at: the widow of Nain receiving her dead son from the hands of the Lord, just as Oliffe's dear mother received him two years ago last Easter-tide from the darkness of the pit.

“In loving memory of our mother,” is the simple inscription beneath the window.

Rhoda and I knelt together for a quiet half hour, side by side. Our hearts were full of a thankfulness which is akin to pain. When she rose from her knees there was a light in her beautiful eyes which I cannot describe. She put her hand into mine, and the earnest pressure we exchanged was more than any words.

The tie between Rhoda and me is a very strong one now. At the door of the church we met our husbands, and then we lingered about for another

half hour before we went in to breakfast. We found little Oliffe struggling with Kelly, who did not like to put him down on his feet in the little garden before Mr. Thompson's house. But his father took one little hand, and I another, and heedless of Kelly's murmurs that the child would be as black as a negro, we led him along—with what pride and joy, who shall say?

How full were those days of happiness as some passed on the same spot were full of pain! The cup is mixed for us all, and a loving Hand gives us to drink the bitter and the sweet as seemeth best to Him.

Past, present, future, are His, and we may not say to Him, "What doest Thou?" Let us believe when we cannot see, and amidst the strife of discordant tones here, rest our souls in the thought of the far-off land, where "beyond these voices there is Peace."

When there is melody in our hearts, as in mine to-day, let us hear in it the perfect harmony of the better life, to which this is but the portal, through which we shall, if we are faithful, enter in God's good time; and let us do our part to strike an answering note of love and sympathy in the hearts of those with whom we are bound up by the ties of kindred and association in the paths of daily life.

A. H.

THE END.

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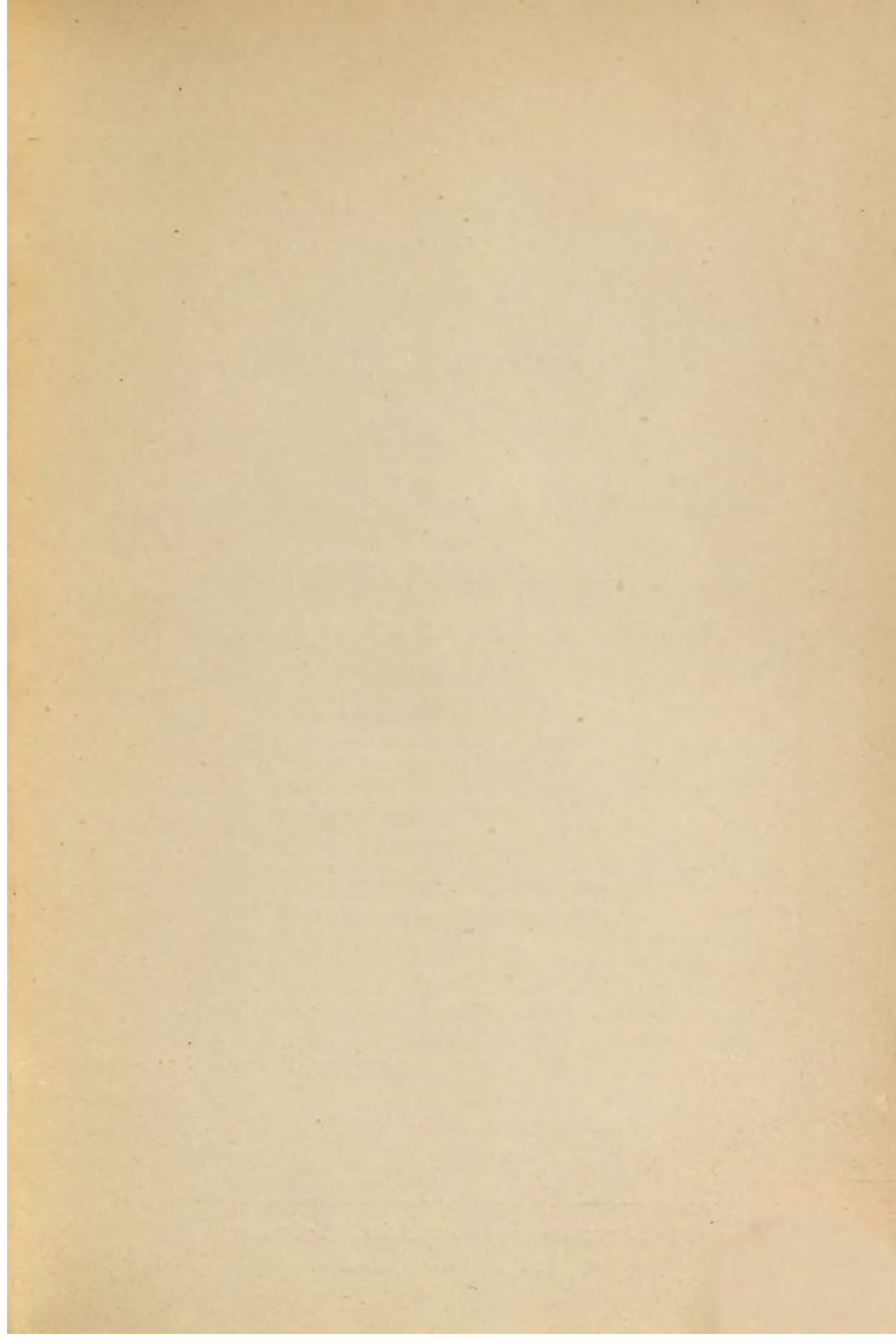
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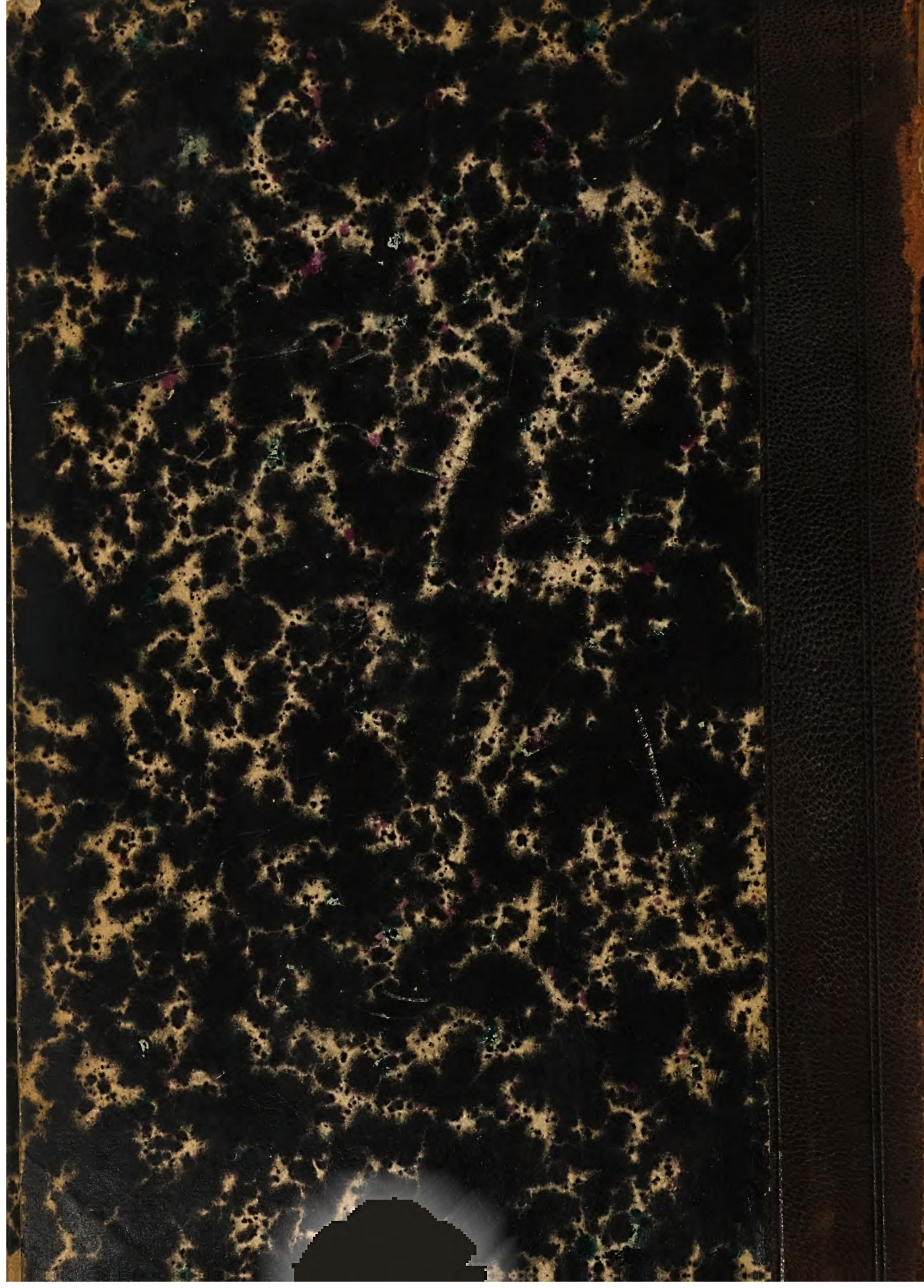
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